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# **Shakespeare, Decolonisation, and the Cold War**

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

WITHIN THE DISCIPLINE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE,

SEPTEMBER 2017

BY

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This thesis is entirely the work of the author and no part of it has previously been submitted for a degree or other qualification with any institution.

# Abstract

This study considers the role that touring Shakespeare productions played in securing British interests during the Cold War and decolonisation. Focusing on a selection of British Council supported tours during the period the relationship between Shakespeare in Britain and Shakespeare abroad is examined. The evolution of touring Shakespeare's use in cultural diplomacy is located within the broader history of Britain's imperial decline and Cold War entanglements. The thesis draws upon the National Archive's Records of the British Council; the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's collections; and the British Library's Newspaper, and Manuscript collections. A wide-range of performance, administrative, and anecdotal accounts are brought to light in order to reveal the political and cultural tensions characterising each tour. The shift to using Shakespeare in post-war cultural diplomacy is determined through an examination of tours supporting British colonial interests in Egypt between 1939 and 1946, a formative era of anti-colonial agitation and emerging Cold War dynamics. The late 1940s saw touring Shakespeare assist in the re-colonisation of Australia, with cultural-diplomatic initiatives dedicated to strengthening Britain's imperial and Cold War objectives. As the military stalemate of the 1950s witnessed the compensatory rise of culture as a political resource, Shakespeare tours countered Soviet influence in Austria, Yugoslavia, and Poland. The 1960s saw Shakespeare used in support of British economic interests in West Africa in general, and UK publishing interests in Nigeria in particular. The thesis concludes that Shakespeare productions were dispatched to Cold War and colonial destinations with the purpose of supporting Britain's commercial and political interests; that Shakespeare proved to be an effective and protean cultural weapon in service to the British nation; and that contradictory results ensued, including resistance from reluctant hosts and disagreements within Britain's metropolitan Shakespeare culture itself over Shakespeare's global role.

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Photo by Angus McBean © RSC, 2017.

Ref ID: 44598.



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*The Tempest* directed by Michael Benthall at The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951.



Photo by Angus McBean © RSC, 2017.

Reference ID: 44709.

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*The Tempest* directed by Michael Benthall at The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951.



Photo by Angus McBean © RSC, 2017.

Reference ID: 44931.

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Photo by Angus McBean © RSC, 2017.

Reference ID: 45376.



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Photo by Angus McBean © RSC, 2017.

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*The Tempest* directed by Michael Benthall at The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1952.



Photo by Angus McBean © RSC, 2017.

Reference ID: 45680.



# List of Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AETTTF	Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust Fund
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
CEMA	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
CRD	Cultural Relations Department (UK Foreign Office)
DAC	Drama Advisory Committee (British Council Dance and Drama Department)
ELT	English Language Teaching
EMB	Empire Marketing Board
ENSA	Entertainment National Services Association
IRD	Information Research Department (UK Foreign Office)
LOP	Laurence Olivier Productions
NAM	The Non-Aligned Movement
RSC	Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon
SMT	Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
SRC	Soviet Relations Committee (UK Foreign Office/British Council)
USIS	United States' Information Services

# Introduction

This study concerns a variety of Shakespeare productions that travelled overseas between 1939 and 1964, a period defined by the Cold War and decolonisation. Although absent from most performance histories these touring events testify to Shakespeare's extensive use in British cultural diplomacy. Over four chapters I present a range of case studies with the principle ones being: Tyrone Guthrie's 1939 Old Vic tour of *Hamlet* to Portugal, Italy, Egypt, and Malta; The Donald Wolfit Shakespearean Company's *Hamlet* in Egypt, 1945; The John Gielgud Company's *Hamlet* in Egypt, 1946; the Australian leg of the Old Vic's 1948 'Commonwealth Tour' of *Richard III*; The Peter Brook Company's 1955 *Hamlet* in Moscow; and The Nottingham Playhouse's 1963 tour of Nigeria with *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night*. In terms of UK productions, I also discuss the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre's staging of *The Tempest* in 1951 and 1952, and *Titus Andronicus* in 1955 prior to its Eastern European tour of Yugoslavia, Austria, and Poland in 1957.

Similar considerations shape my questions for all of these productions: why was Shakespeare so frequently called upon to represent British theatrical culture overseas, and why these plays and productions in particular? What impact did the practice of cultural diplomacy have on Britain's domestic Shakespeare industry? How were these tours received by foreign audiences and experienced by the theatre practitioners tasked to undertake them? Within the context of the Cold War and decolonisation, did these cultural expeditions support specific policy goals? What strategic, political, or commercial advantages could possibly be gained from touring Shakespeare overseas, and were such aims and objectives achieved?

## The Archive

My research came about as a result of volunteering to catalogue part of the performance audio collection held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Amongst the stacks I came across 78 rpm acetate discs of the incidental music and sound effects used on various mid-century tours of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Soviet Union, and Continental Europe.<sup>1</sup> Other fragile ephemera, such as processed film reels documenting the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre's visit to Australia in 1953 and a rare copy of Solomon Mikhoel's 1935 Moscow State Jewish Theatre production of *King Lear*, suggested a significant though long-neglected touring history, much of the evidence for which now rested in obsolete and inaccessible formats.<sup>2</sup>

A substantive lack of supplementary material enhanced this sense of silence and omission. Although the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust keeps exhaustive records of all UK press reviews there are few if any on overseas tours. Annual souvenir programmes provided the fullest commentary, though they were as proud and celebratory in tone as they were light and evasive in content. The 1957 edition for instance, merely provides a map of the *Titus Andronicus* tour's route across 'The Continent and London' accompanied by a selection of Angus McBean's glamorous photographs taken from the initial Stratford residency two years previously.<sup>3</sup> Such articles functioned primarily as an advertisement for the production's London residence at the Stoll Theatre upon its return. Although it was certainly no national secret, any details of the tour's exploits overseas

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<sup>1</sup> On the use of acetate discs and panatrope players in post-war theatre, see David Collison, *The Sound of Theatre: From the Ancient Greeks to the Modern Digital Age* (Eastbourne: Plasa, 2008), pp. 127-58.

<sup>2</sup> On Mikhoel's *King Lear*, see Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War* (London: Profile Books, 2013), p. 292. On archive encounters, see Antionette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> John Goodwin, ed., *Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Annual Programme, 1957* (Eversham: Journal Press, 1957), pp. 39-42.

were compressed into such brief vignettes that served merely to celebrate its triumphant conclusion.

Fortunately the theatre world relies on more informal channels to record its history and a comparison of the original *Titus Andronicus* cast list against published biographies led to Michael Blakemore's *Arguments With England* (2005) amongst others. Such first-hand accounts suggested that the actors experienced the tour as a landmark expedition behind the Iron Curtain and as an important cultural intervention in the Cold War itself.<sup>4</sup> Despite the delicate diplomatic sensitivities involved in touring the Eastern bloc following the Hungarian uprising, or Nigeria in the immediate wake of full independence, actors' biographies helped flesh out the performance history with pertinent details, revealing stories, and wonderfully indiscreet gossip. In contrast to the bare outline provided by official commemorations, I found them to confirm Paul Menzer's assertion that 'the history of theatre told *by* the theatre is an anecdotal one'.<sup>5</sup> Despite being informal, and even unverifiable in many cases, biographical travelogues constitute an important repository for this study. They reveal British theatre's attempts at self-fashioning in response to its deployment into fraught Cold War and decolonising contexts.

The breakthrough that brought these diverse performance documents together came with the realisation that they had one administrative element in common. Each tour had been taken under the auspices of the British Council, an organisation whose declared mission is to 'create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries' through 'cultural relations and educational opportunities'.<sup>6</sup> Although the British Council's activities today are chiefly centred around the provision English language teaching, it is also active in promoting the UK through a

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Blakemore, *Arguments with England* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), pp. 161-71

<sup>5</sup> Paul Menzer, *Anecdotal Shakespeare: A New Performance History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> The British Council, 'Our Organisation', <<https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation>> [Accessed 1 April 2017].

wide range of cultural practices from music, fine arts, literature, dance, and drama. A survey of interviews with retired British Council personnel held in the British Library's Theatre Archive Project led to the realisation that, beyond supplying occasional financial support, the organisation was commissioning Shakespeare productions for touring as late as 1964.<sup>7</sup> With its links to the UK theatre industry and extensive global network, the organisation was instrumental in facilitating the projection of staged British Shakespeare abroad throughout the early post-war period.<sup>8</sup>

Such oral accounts prompted further inquiries into the Records of the British Council held by the National Archives, Kew.<sup>9</sup> Within this extensive archive, minutes of the Drama Advisory Committee (DAC), Regional Reports, and Annual Reports have been especially germane.<sup>10</sup> The DAC acted as an important conduit between nominally separate arenas of civic and political life, with its records providing insight into the close working relationship between British cultural diplomacy and the post-war theatre establishment.<sup>11</sup> The DAC linked artistic, academic, commercial, and governmental spheres, allowing the British Council an extraordinary degree of access and flexibility in its dealings with Britain's creative industries. In Robert Phillipson's assessment, committees made up of such 'eminent professionals' ensured that the organisation enjoyed access to 'key people and developments in the relevant field':

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<sup>7</sup> Sophie Bush, 'Valerie West Interview Transcript' (London: British Library Theatre Archive Project, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Within the historical scope of this study, the total expenditure for the British Council grew from £178,466 in 1938-1939 to £13,036,514 by 1964-1965. See 'Appendix 5: Income and Expenditure 1934-1984', in Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p. 383.

<sup>9</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the available holdings see, The National Archives, 'Records of the British Council', <<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C40>> [Accessed 28 April 2017].

<sup>10</sup> Although initially titled 'The Dance and Drama Advisory Committee'. I have retained the later and shortened title and abbreviate as DAC throughout.

<sup>11</sup> Although the notion of a coherently identifiable 'theatre establishment' is problematic, the prevalence of the same names across both creative and administrative archives indicates a network that shared strong personal, class, and cultural links. I retain such phrases in order to discuss relevant class-cultural issues, an approach typical of many historical studies of Britain's early post-war consensus. See for example, Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995), pp. 75-79; Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-war Britain* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 89-90, pp. 322-26; Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review* (London: Verso Books, 1981).

It guarantees that the Council is sensitive to a considerable range of pressures from both governmental and private interests. It is relatively autonomous on the executive level, but could not function effectively unless it was attuned to the needs of government and to relevant sectors of private business.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, the DAC's minutes provide a detailed record of the assessment, decision-making, and planning stages of each tour, as well as a sense of their subsequent reception overseas. Accounts of how tours fared closer to the ground can be found in the relevant Representative Reports from each country visited. As internal documents circulating back to London from overseas, such dispatches provide detailed and unguarded accounts of the challenges and opportunities that each tour encountered. The voice of higher officialdom, such as Foreign Office reports, Colonial and Commonwealth Office commentary, and High Commissioners' responses, can also be found in Annual Reports or as attached amendments.<sup>13</sup>

The rich cultural history lying dormant within these archives has been instrumental in contextualising the fragments of performance materials I have discovered elsewhere, and has prompted the partial recovery of the British Council's own institutional memory. I have placed the micro-narratives of individual tours within this broader macro-history, and have weaved these seemingly heterogeneous threads into a larger tapestry illustrating Shakespeare's deployment overseas in service to British cultural diplomacy between 1939 and 1964.

## Shakespeare

My thesis provides a thick historical description of Shakespeare in performance by bringing several layers of researched materials into revealing tension. As well as utilising

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> The complete list of archives consulted in the writing of this thesis is: The British Library's Manuscript Collection; The British Library's Newspaper Collection; The National Archives, Kew; Nottinghamshire County Council's Archives on the Nottingham Playhouse Trust; Nottingham University Archive; The University of Leeds Special Collections Archive; The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

conventional performance documents such as press notices, publicity materials, set designs, and costume plans, I also rely heavily upon anecdotal accounts such as published biographies, travelogues, letters, diaries, unpublished private journals, and manuscripts. This multi-layered approach builds upon recent interest in Shakespeare's international cultural history, such as Andrew Dickson's *Worlds Elsewhere: Journeys Around Shakespeare's Globe* (2016) and Edward Wilson Lee's *Shakespeare in Swahililand: Adventures with the Ever-Living Poet* (2016).<sup>14</sup> Eschewing bardolatry or celebration of Shakespeare's international preponderance however, I consider to what extent political and diplomatic manoeuvres lie behind the early history of what is today termed 'Global Shakespeare'.<sup>15</sup> Rather than accepting Shakespeare's universality and relevance as inexplicable, what could the study and understanding of Britain's more instrumental uses of England's national poet for concrete imperial and Cold War aims show us?

In paying close attention to the prevalence and meaning of tour anecdotes I follow recent developments in Shakespeare performance history, such as Paul Menzer's *Anecdotal Shakespeare* (2015). I extend such approaches by treating actors' accounts as an example of post-war travel writing, and pay particular attention to their frequent use of imperial and Cold War rhetorical effects.<sup>16</sup> Coming from a more post-colonial concern, I set out to juxtapose the perspectives of British visitors against opposite local accounts, bringing previously submerged, silenced, and redacted narratives fully to bear against a

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Dickson, *Worlds Elsewhere: Journeys Around Shakespeare's Globe* (London: Vintage, 2016); Edward Wilson-Lee, *Shakespeare in Swahililand: Adventures with the Ever-Living Poet* (London: William Collins, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Alexander C. Y. Huang, 'Global Shakespeares as Methodology', *Shakespeare*, 9.3 (2013), 273-90; Jill L. Levenson and Robert Ormsby, eds., *The Shakespearean World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017). For examples of the uses that Shakespeare has been put to in a variety of British state-cultural celebrations and commemorative events see, Clara Calvo and Coppelia Kahn, eds., *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> For critical analysis on post-war travel writing see, Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). On imperial and Cold War rhetoric see, David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Martin J. Medhurst and others, eds., *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor and Ideology* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

contradictory official archive. I aim to contribute to the performance history of the Shakespeare plays under discussion and provide a new cultural history of the crucial, though previously unacknowledged, role that Shakespeare tours played in British diplomacy during the early post-war era.

## **Decolonisation**

Between 1957 (Ghana) and 1968 (Swaziland), seventeen former British colonies in Africa won their independence.<sup>17</sup> Within postcolonial studies however, these dates are routinely extended in order to account for the historical forces that led to such landmark events in the first place. Mark Philip Bradley for instance, orientates his study of twentieth-century global decolonisation from the immediate aftermath of World War One.<sup>18</sup> Although my study does not return to the First World War as Bradley's does, it dates back to before decolonisation, starting on the eve of the Second World War.

There are three reasons for this expanded time frame. First, an emphasis on the constellation of fixed dates when independence was formally achieved risks placing too much emphasis on the metropole's role in 'granting' formal recognition and independence. In order to understand the historical pressures that brought about decolonisation despite British reticence, my study begins in 1939 with consideration of Anglo-Egyptian relations immediately prior to and following the Second World War. Secondly, although the era of decolonisation does not correspond exactly with the periodisation of the Cold War, the military defeats suffered by European powers from 1939 onwards shaped the trajectory of both processes, coinciding with and contributing

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Philip Bradley, 'Decolonisation, the global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Cold War: Volume I: Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) (464-485), p. 464. Wm. Roger Louis, 'The Dissolution of the British Empire', in Judith Brown and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) (329-356), p. 330.

<sup>18</sup> Bradley, pp. 466-70.



to, the rapid consolidation of US and Soviet global power across the third world.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, an extended historical frame helps establish the context that produced the rationale for touring Shakespeare to nations in the throes of decolonisation or under Cold War pressure.

Broadly defined, the term decolonisation signifies the process of the ending of Britain's formal Empire and its transition towards Commonwealth and ex-imperial status in the decades immediately following the Second World War.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting the more variegated realities of Britain's ever-adaptable imperial system, this thesis covers a range of specific imperial settlements and relations from informal Empire in Egypt, Dominion re-colonisation in Australia, Third World resistance and the adaptation of Non-Aligned positions within the global Cold War, and Nigeria's earliest encounters with Anglo-American neo-colonialism.<sup>21</sup> This study asks what role Shakespeare tours played within this transitional phase from Empire to Commonwealth. To what extent did the struggle to curtail Communism within decolonising nation-states shape British cultural diplomacy? Could Shakespeare tours really have helped secure the continuation of British influence into the postcolonial era?

Provocatively, the historian J. M. Lee asserts that for Britain 'the insubstantiality of cultural diplomacy is part of the trauma of losing great power status'.<sup>22</sup> Such a

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<sup>19</sup> Bradley, p. 482.

<sup>20</sup> See, Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007); John Darwin *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John Gallagher, ed., *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Stephen Howe, ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); John Springhall, *Decolonisation Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Belich defines re-colonisation as the second phase following an initial period of 'explosive colonisation' and 'supercharged growth' where settler colonies were culturally and economically reintegrated back towards the metropolis despite their political divergence. James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth. The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world, 1780s-1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 9, pp. 179-80. See also, James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders, 1880-2000* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2002). I use the term 'Third World' in order to maintain the sense of its historical origins in the early Cold War period, as a means of defining the ambitions of decolonising nations away from the binary outlook of the Western 'First World' and the Soviet 'Second World'.

<sup>22</sup> J. M. Lee, 'British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War: 1946-1961', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 9.1 (1998), 112-34 (p. 112).

statement suggests that post-war tours could be viewed as acts of desperation aimed at shoring up dwindling imperial prestige. Do the archives evidence this degree of imperial anxiety and if so, did Shakespeare provide much of a panacea? In *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (2004) Bernard Porter denies that Britain's declining imperial status had any impact on its domestic theatre scene whatsoever.<sup>23</sup> However, as increases in international touring facilitated a growth in cultural circulation within the post-war British Empire, wouldn't the migration of such talent and ideas have had an impact on the post-war metropolitan stage as well? Wouldn't theatre companies have happily exploited the international opportunities that touring provided in order to secure their continued growth and survival at home?

### **The Cold War**

In February 1946 US diplomat George F. Kennan called for the containment of the Soviet Union in response to Stalin's statement that the world now held only 'two centres of world significance' between whom there could be no 'permanent *modus vivendi*'.<sup>24</sup> Although Kennan's 'Long Telegram' is often hailed as signalling the start of the Cold War, a longer view is necessary to understand how by 1946 both the United States and Soviet Russia had reached a shared belief in the universal applicability of their competing world systems. In order to delineate the ideological origins of the conflict, historical

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<sup>23</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. vii. For an alternative view that considers how the demise of the British Empire impacted British cultural life despite prevalent, superficial silences, see Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Rachel Gilmour and Bill Schwarz, eds., *End of Empire and the English Novel since 1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2013), pp. 1-26; Stuart Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 73-84.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth M. Jensen, ed., *Origins of the Cold War* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1993), p. 18; David C. Engerman, 'Ideology and the origins of the Cold War, 1917-1962', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Cold War, Volume I: Origins* (20-43), pp. 34-5.

surveys can reach as far back as 1917 to the close of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the subsequent western-backed Russian civil war.<sup>25</sup>

Following Kennan's advice, President Truman sought to challenge the apparent expansion of Soviet influence at its geographical boundaries. Beginning with a focus on the fractured landscape of post-war Germany and Europe in the second half of the 1940s, the conflict spread to Asia following Mao Zedong's establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and continued to expand outwards into the emerging Third World throughout the 1950s. As the rapid retreat of Europe's global empires presented new terrain for US-Soviet competition, each power bloc sought to influence newly independent nations and replicate their respective political systems throughout the post-imperial world.<sup>26</sup>

My thesis concludes in 1963, a point at which the Cold War's struggle for global domination changed in character. Although the contestation had previously sought 'persuasion over conquest', the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962 revealed how nuclear proliferation had allowed the Cold War's military escalation in the Third World to 'endanger the superpowers themselves'.<sup>27</sup> John F. Kennedy's assassination in late 1963 and Khrushchev's replacement by Leonid Brezhnev in 1964 signalled the start of an era that was more pragmatic than ideological, characterised by guarded mutual acceptance, measured coexistence, and even the relative normalisation of bilateral relations.<sup>28</sup> The cautionary TV spectacle of intractable proxy wars in Vietnam and Angola suggested that the Cold War's most lethal polarities had been contained and pushed back to a global 'periphery', signalling a distinct change in the nature of the conflict.

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<sup>25</sup> For the ways in which these events emboldened anti-imperial struggles globally see, Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 15-17, pp. 79-80.

<sup>26</sup> Between 1945 and 1965 decolonisation saw The United Nations grow from 51 to 117 members. Bradley, p. 464.

<sup>27</sup> Engerman, pp. 41-2.

<sup>28</sup> Engerman, p. 43.

The chronological span of this thesis mostly covers the earliest decades of the Cold War, between 1945 and 1963. The ideological temperament of these opening decades saw the US and the Soviet Union prioritise cultural, technological, and economic strategies as a means of extending their influence. Pertinently for this study, Cold War politics prompted the deployment of British Shakespeare companies overseas as part of a range of cultural countermeasures. Post-war technological development in transport and communications would see a marked evolution from the shipping of entire theatre companies to Australia and New Zealand in the late 1940s to charter flights to previously inaccessible countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone by the early 1960s. Despite the promise and potential of such improvements, financial restraints would see the size of touring companies reduced significantly. Though such ambitious and larger-scale company tours were the norm during my period of study, I conclude just prior to the point where smaller companies, travelling duos, and solo recitation tours by senior ‘star’ actors started to become the norm.

As a battle fought by means other than direct military conflict, the overt and covert projection of competing ideological worldviews were constitutive elements of the Cold War. Alongside the provision of political and economic support for client regimes, culture became a primary means for international engagement in a polarised world in which the Soviet Union claimed culture to be ‘one of the three most significant spheres of power and contestation’.<sup>29</sup> From the 1930s onwards, Shakespeare became a prize of world-historical significance as Liberal-Democratic, Communist, and Fascist ideologies fought to assert themselves as the rightful inheritors of Europe’s Enlightenment tradition. A good deal of scholarship exists on Soviet appropriations of Shakespeare, in the essay collections such as Alexandr Parfenov and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Russian Essays*

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<sup>29</sup> Irena R. Makaryk, “‘Here is my Space’: The 1964 Shakespeare Celebrations in the USSR”, in *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe: Conflict, Commemoration and Celebration*, ed. by Erica Sheen and Isabel Karremann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2016), pp. 51-62 (p. 53).

on *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (1998) and Irena R. Makaryk and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism* (2006) for instance.<sup>30</sup> Interest in Fascist Shakespeare has also grown recently in Irena R. Makaryk and Marissa McHugh, eds., *Shakespeare and the Second World War: Theatre, Culture and Identity* (2012) and Keith Gregor, ed., *Shakespeare and Tyranny: Regimes of Reading in Europe and Beyond* (2014).<sup>31</sup> Little however has been written on Britain's use of Shakespeare as a countermeasure against such Fascist and Communist appropriations, or as a means of sustaining the antithetical ideological position of Europe's Liberal-Democracy in an era of imperial decline.<sup>32</sup> Despite any belief that Liberal Democracy is beyond ideology itself, it seems probable that if British Shakespeare were deployed to counter Fascist and Communist claims over a period of decades, it must have borne traces of such instrumental usage. Besides the potential of dictating the form and content of specific productions, wouldn't the Cultural Cold War have had some impact on the institutional practices and evolution of Britain's Shakespeare industry itself?

Erica Sheen and Isabel Karremann, eds., *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe* (2016) addresses areas of concern similar to mine, though examining different productions and locations.<sup>33</sup> It contributes a great deal to our knowledge of various Communist Shakespeares but does not provide sustained consideration on how fighting the Cold War shaped Britain's own practices, or the institutional implications that ensued from the

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<sup>30</sup> Irena R. Makaryk and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Alexandr Parfenov and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Russian Essays on Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Irena R. Makaryk and Marissa McHugh, eds., *Shakespeare and the Second World War: Theatre, Culture and Identity*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Keith Gregor, ed., *Shakespeare and Tyranny: Regimes of Reading in Europe and Beyond* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> For studies on Shakespeare's role throughout Europe's political history see, Dirk Delabastita, and others, eds., *Shakespeare and European Politics* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2008). For Britain's involvement in orchestrating anti-Communist propaganda more generally see, Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Erica Sheen and Isabel Karremann, eds., *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe: Conflict, Commemoration and Celebration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2016). Alfred Thomas, *Shakespeare, Dissent and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) though similarly titled to this study, differs greatly, comparing Catholic dissent and persecution in Shakespeare's era to Cold War dissidents' uses of Shakespeare in film.

necessary creation of state-private networks. Furthermore, it is not concerned with the role that Shakespeare played in sites beyond Europe and the part it played in superpower contestations taking place in countries such as Egypt, Australia, and Nigeria. As recent scholarship has shown, consideration of anti-colonial struggles and Third World histories benefit greatly when also taking Cold War dynamics firmly into account.<sup>34</sup> As Odd Arne Westad stresses in his influential study *The Global Cold War* (2007), a Third World perspective on the Cold War helps move our viewpoint beyond the usual over-determined historical accounts that focus exclusively on East-West state diplomacy and military crises. It moves us towards more regional perspectives that experienced the Cold War as a constitutive force in the formation of postcolonial nation-states from the outset.<sup>35</sup> This is the perspective that I adopt in order to capture the historical details of British Shakespeare productions that toured within decolonising contexts during the Cold War.

## Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 provides three case studies of Mediterranean tours of *Hamlet* between 1939 and 1946. This discussion establishes some of the formative colonial and Cold War features of the Second World War era. It contests the common notion that Britain's earliest forays into cultural diplomacy were merely 'enemy led' anti-Fascist measures, demonstrating how long held imperial and anti-Communist concerns were at the forefront from the outset.<sup>36</sup> The Old Vic's attempt to appease Portuguese and Italian

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<sup>34</sup> For colonial perspectives on the end of Empire, see Prasenjit Duara, ed., *Decolonisation: Perspectives from Now and Then* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2007). For intersections between the Cold War and decolonisation see, Robert J. McMahon, ed., *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Westad, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> For the role that culture has played in the formation of twentieth-century British diplomacy and propaganda, see Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999); Jorn

decision-making elites through Shakespeare came up against the hard realisation that overseas, England's national poet had already been appropriated to the Fascist cause, leading many of the actors involved to reflect critically upon the UK's own cultural-political landscape. During the 1945 and 1946 Cairo and Alexandria Drama Festivals, an uneasy post-war entente dissipated in the face of nationalist student uprising against Britain's continuing occupation. The additional pressure of competing Russian and American influence within Egypt helped facilitate the breakdown of Britain's world system. Belated attempts at using Shakespearean soft power to bolster Britain's cultural image and support its colonial education policies in Egypt signalled the growing importance of cultural diplomacy by the start of the formal Cold War period.

Chapter 2 considers the Old Vic's 1948 'Commonwealth Tour' of *Richard III*. This project sought to strengthen UK-Dominion ties and used the symbolic capital of Shakespeare to help the 'mother country' leverage the importation of essential food aid from Australia and New Zealand. The re-colonisation of Australia involved both active exploitation of the cultural cringe and the construction of a shared Commonwealth identity that was represented as linguistically English and racially white.<sup>37</sup> Such notions were mirrored in changes to metropolitan self-fashioning in the face of increasing non-white Commonwealth migration into Britain itself, which increased from the mid-to-late 1940s. Ambitious regional theatres such as Stratford-upon-Avon's Shakespeare Memorial

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Weingartner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War: Britain and the Shaping of National Morale in the Second World War* (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> According to Stephen Alomes, the cultural cringe and the idea that 'Australian culture and achievement is inferior' stems from deep 'settler/invasor' anxieties rooted in 'dual colonialism'. A sense of guilt/superiority 'over the 'Natives'' mixed with feelings of resentment/inferiority towards 'the imperial centre' of London. Over time, such binary and hierarchical patterns fuelled pervasive myths and clichés of an uncultured Australia that views intellectual achievement as alien whilst also overcompensating with exaggerated self-confidence. For Alomes' full definition see his entry 'Colonial Cultural Cringe: Australia', in Prem Poddar and David Johnson, eds., *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 104-05. For Arthur Philips' original coinage and discussion, see A. A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition: Studies in a Colonial Culture* (Melbourne: Cheshire Press, 1958). On Anglo-Australian cultural relations see, Kate Darian-Smith and Patricia Grimshaw, eds., *Britishness Abroad* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007). For shifting notions of Englishness and white racial identity in the mid twentieth century see, Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996).

Theatre were able to position themselves as a locus of ‘deep England’, whilst Shakespeare was elevated as a nativist cultural symbol, able to synthesise the shared political, racial, and linguistic identities of this Greater-British ideal.<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 2 also includes a detailed performance history of Loudon Sainthill’s set and costume design work for Michael Benthall’s production of *The Tempest* during the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre’s Festival of Britain Season, 1951-52. Following his support for the Old Vic’s Commonwealth Tour to Australia and New Zealand, Sainthill’s creative impact upon the British stage illustrates further ways in which Shakespeare touring practices perpetuated ‘complex patterns of symbolic and cultural connection’ between Australia and the UK.<sup>39</sup> Detailed consideration of Sainthill’s work gives us the opportunity to consider how such ‘returning’ traffic both strengthened and tested the elite cultural affiliations that existed between white-settler Dominions and the imperial centre.

There is a postcolonial theoretical justification for including a lengthy section on Sainthill’s stage work during the Festival of Britain. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), antagonism between ‘cultural subservience’ towards Britain and an emerging ‘assertion of Australian identity’ characterised post-war Australia’s cultural landscape.<sup>40</sup> In the terms employed in G.A. Wilkes’ *The Stockyard and the Croquet Lawn* (1981), the Australian literary tradition was a debate between the two conflicting traditions of the ‘genteel’ and more national-populist modes of writing.<sup>41</sup> On the surface such debates suggest that the Old Vic tour should be viewed as a literal example of imported British culture displacing the indigenous. Indeed,

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<sup>38</sup> For the Second World War origins and definition of the ‘deep England’ myth, see Hewison, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, ‘Introduction to Diaspora’, in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995) (425-27), p. 426.

<sup>40</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989), p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> G.A. Wilkes, *The Stockyard and the Croquet Lawn* (Melbourne: Edward Arnold, 1981).



there was an enormous appetite for imported British theatrical culture amongst the loyalist Australian elites that Sainthill epitomised. Closer examination of the reception of Sainthill's design work for the metropolitan stage however, reveals the ambiguous ways in which re-staging Shakespeare offered the Australian diaspora a means of asserting its indigenous cultural identity within a continuing sense of 'European inheritance'.<sup>42</sup>

Sainthill's work on the Stratford-upon-Avon stage provides a fascinating example of 'writing', or rather 'performing', back to the metropolitan centre. As John Thieme states in his study *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (2001), literary 'writing back' is not necessarily antagonistic. Sainthill's staging of Shakespeare can be considered as operating along a 'continuum, in which the influence of the 'original' could seldom be seen as simply adversarial, or [...] complicitous'.<sup>43</sup> In the process of using Shakespeare to claim his place at the British theatre industry's top table, Sainthill managed to strengthen the cultural affiliations that existed between elite sections of UK and Australian society whilst also dismantling some longstanding hierarchical positioning between the two. Building upon its initial focus of British tours visiting Australia, Chapter 2 goes on to establish how the audacious, 'antipodean' style of Sainthill's neo-Baroque and neo-Romantic stage design for *The Tempest* at Stratford-upon-Avon, managed to both assert and disrupt its avowed celebration of Britain's post-war cultural renewal during the Festival of Britain.

Following the death of Stalin, a military stalemate on the continent led to a thaw in relations, with culture becoming a significant front in Europe's Cold War. Chapter 3 provides a history of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre's touring production of *Titus Andronicus* to France, Austria, Yugoslavia, and Poland in 1957, and considers how this tour led to the rehabilitation of a previously marginal text back into the Shakespeare

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<sup>42</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 134.

<sup>43</sup> John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 2.

canon. The consequent UK publication of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964) by the Polish émigré critic Jan Kott is also considered as part of the tour's legacy and as a literary intervention in the Cultural Cold War project that aimed at countering Communist influence at home as well as abroad.

Chapter 4 provides an account of the Nottingham Playhouse's 1963 tour of *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* to West Africa, and Nigeria in particular. It focuses on how touring Shakespeare helped secure cultural capital for the advancement of British commercial interests, such as educational publishing. The Nottingham Players' tour was an intervention in Nigeria's resurgent post-independent theatre scene, with its initial public reception indicating considerable resistance to the return of colonial-era practices and cultural assumptions. British and American philanthropic investment in the key developmental areas that supported Nigeria's nascent creative industries meant that post-independence artists found themselves receiving support and validation from wealthy institutions harbouring powerful and controlling neo-colonial agendas.

## **Conclusion**

In bringing a wealth of neglected materials and evidence to light, the following study deliberately follows the archive's Anglo-centric iteration of imperial power relations. That is, of Shakespeare being domestically nurtured, officially validated, and professionally deployed 'out' towards targeted foreign audiences for specific political purposes and commercial gains. I simultaneously read against the grain of such assumptions, and place these official and anecdotal interpretations in critical dialogue with extant local accounts that contest and contradict them. Such proximate tensions help bring into sharper relief the expansionist, proselytising, and homogenising intentions behind each tour. This study reveals the cultural and performance history of a variety of Shakespeare tours

aimed at promoting British interests abroad between 1939 and 1964, a period of decolonisation and Cold War contestation.

## Chapter 1.

### Shakespeare and Cultural Diplomacy: *Hamlet* in the Mediterranean

On 23 November 1938 Lord Lloyd, the Chairman of the British Council, delivered a speech at the opening of the British Institute in Lisbon in which he acknowledged the ‘frequent accusation against the British’ that they had been ‘too proud, or too indifferent, or perhaps too lazy, to make available, even to their friends, the riches of their civilisation’.<sup>1</sup> This he suggested was due to a ‘reluctance to advertise [...] born of the age of laissez-faire’ that had led many to consider the British ‘cold commercial Philistines, interested only in trade, finance and sport’. With the establishment of a British Institute in Lisbon however, Portuguese students would be invited to study Britain’s ‘literature and our language, or science or industry; or those problems which, as the inheritors and administrators of huge African territories, we are jointly interested to examine and to solve’. He urged his Portuguese audience to keep in mind ‘the things that really unite us so closely’:

we are both Empires fashioned in the same manner and founded upon the seas by the adventurous and daring spirit of our two races. Both of us possess a great Colonial Empire discovered, occupied and civilised by our sons of which we are not only rightly proud, but strongly tenacious.<sup>2</sup>

In accepting a copy of Luis Vas de Camoens’ *The Lusiads* (1572) from the Portuguese Minister of National Education, Lloyd returned that he:

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 52/1 British Institute at Lisbon 1938-1939, ‘Lord Lloyd’s Speech’, 23 November 1938.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: BW 52/1, ‘Lord Lloyd’s Speech’, 23 November 1938.

Could not do better than present to Your Excellency the works of our greatest national poet, in a form representative of the best in modern Shakespeare scholarship and of the best in modern English book production.<sup>3</sup>

Lloyd's inauguration speech in Lisbon signalled Britain's recognition that it could no longer rely simply upon the reputation of its wealth and power to guarantee its prestige overseas, and that it needed to be more proactive in projecting a positive image of itself to the world.<sup>4</sup> Britain's desire to keep Portugal and Spain neutral in any future conflict with Germany was predicated upon establishing as many shared political and cultural interests as possible. As a steady stream of anti-British propaganda flowed from Italy's Radio Bari, stoking anti-imperial sentiments across the Mediterranean basin, Lloyd calculated that focusing on common interests such as cultural heritage, imperial status, and strong anti-Communist sentiment would persuade Portugal to keep out of any upcoming conflict.<sup>5</sup> It is striking that Lloyd should have focused on the symbolism of Shakespeare and Camoens in celebrating this new entente with Fascist Portugal, as both writers had strong associations with national esteem and shared imperial status.

In this chapter I will consider the imperial dimensions of Britain's earliest uses of Shakespeare as cultural propaganda across the Mediterranean region, both immediately prior to and following the Second World War. In order to focus my study, I consider the ways in which three touring productions of *Hamlet* pursued various policy aims in 1939, 1945, and 1946 respectively. First of all, the Old Vic company's pro-appeasement engagement with Portuguese, Italian, and Egyptian decision-making elites during its 1939

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<sup>3</sup> TNA: BW 52/1, 'Lord Lloyd's Speech', 23 November 1938.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'cultural projection' comes from this late 1930s era when Stephen Tallents first articulated the need for Britain to advertise itself abroad. See, Stephen Tallents, *The Projection of England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933). At different times and in different contexts various terms have been preferred or avoided including 'propaganda', 'public relations', 'soft power', or phrases such as 'explaining' and 'promoting' 'the British way of life'. Throughout this study I use Tallents' original term 'cultural projection' as it retains a strong sense of Anglo-centrism, the practical and material effort involved in undertaking cultural propaganda, and the temporary and illusory quality of its effects.

<sup>5</sup> At Churchill's behest, Lloyd sometimes used his trips establishing British Institutes overseas as cover for conducting informal meetings with various European and Near Eastern heads of state. John Charmley, *Lord Lloyd and the Decline of the British Empire* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), pp. 217-41.

tour; secondly, the Donald Wolfit Company's provision of Shakespeare as part of the Allied forces' celebrations in Egypt, 1945; and finally, the John Gielgud Company's attempt to strengthen Anglo-Egyptian ties and bolster elite institutions of colonial education against a background of anti-British student protests in Egypt, 1946.

The prelude to the Second World War was certainly not the first occasion when Shakespeare had been utilised as propaganda by the British state.<sup>6</sup> This chapter however focuses on the earliest stages of the state-sanctioned projection of British stage productions of Shakespeare overseas, a phenomenon that began in the late 1930s. This chapter will map the transition of such practices from their origins during the prelude to the Cold War in 1939 to its more formal opening stages from 1945, and address several concerns. Given the aggression of Fascist propaganda at the time, how was Shakespeare considered an appropriate response? Despite the usual 'enemy-led' accounts of Britain's reluctant participation in projecting propaganda abroad (that it arose as a belated strategy to confront Fascist aggression), doesn't the British Council's leadership under Lord Lloyd (a previous Governor of Mumbai and High Commissioner to Egypt) demonstrate continuing concern over Britain's colonial status as well? From a performance history perspective, why was *Hamlet* so frequently chosen for touring and how were these particular productions received overseas? Did they succeed in promoting a British Shakespeare-in-performance tradition, or were they immersed in a crowded cosmopolitan market that made competing and effective counterclaims? Finally, given the contingent and precarious nature of theatre work in general, what kind of relationships were formed between jobbing actors, politically emboldened cultural

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<sup>6</sup> For Anglo-German commemorations of Shakespeare during the First World War, see Jonathan Bate, 'Shakespeare Nationalised, Shakespeare Privatised', *English*, 42 (1993), 1-18; Mathew C. Hendley, 'Cultural Mobilisation and British Responses to Cultural Transfer in Total War: Shakespeare Tercentenary of 1916', *First World War Studies*, 3.1 (2012), 25-49; Monika Smialkowska, 'Introduction: Mobilising Shakespeare During the Great War', *Shakespeare*, 10.3 (2014), 225-29.

administrators, and the foreign audiences being targeted by such ambitious and ground-breaking cultural outreach?

### **Imperial Decline and the Rise of Cultural Diplomacy**

In most accounts of the British Council's early history, imperial aspects of its origins are occluded behind a narrative that assert how its role developed in order to confront

Fascism in the late 1930s.<sup>7</sup> Philip M. Taylor summarises such a view, stating that it was a:

democratic response to the new and urgent problems caused by the emergence of the totalitarian state in Europe [...] powerfully and deliberately directed against British interests abroad [that] forced Britain onto the defensive by offering foreign audiences an alternative ideology. Hence the council's projection of British democratic institutions and indeed all that was considered best in the British way of life.<sup>8</sup>

My discussion seeks to emphasise the imperial character of the various 'British interests abroad' that faced international pressures before and after the Axis threat. I stress how propaganda techniques used to project 'democratic institutions' and the 'British way of life' also targeted European states with shared imperial concerns. Anti-Fascist British cultural propaganda emerged within this deeper, pro-imperial and anti-Communist interwar context. Of chief concern for my overall argument are the ways in which pre-war attitudes towards the deployment of cultural diplomacy laid the foundation for practices that would multiply and prosper throughout the first decades of the Cold War and have direct impact upon various processes of decolonisation.

Prior to the Second World War a number of links between imperial concerns and what was then termed cultural projection can be seen. Economically speaking, as early as

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<sup>7</sup> For the semi-official history of the British Council, see Frances Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984). For the interwar origins of British propaganda overseas see, Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: Propaganda during the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). For British Council propaganda activities in the Second World War see, Edward Corse, *A Battle for Neutral Europe: British Cultural Propaganda during the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). For a more critical view of the British Council's remit and institutional structure see, Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, *Selling Democracy*, p. 77.

1929 the description of Britain's commercial losses in the face of increasing global competition (as outlined in the 1930 D'Abernon 'Report on a British Economic Mission to South America') persuaded the Treasury that commerce and culture were now 'mutually complementary'.<sup>9</sup> This led to the removal of an eleven-year embargo against financial provision for cultural diplomacy. The D'Abernon Report helped instigate a broad range of cultural and educational exchanges, from the establishment of English language libraries overseas to the earliest deployment of theatrical companies. The overall intention was to raise Britain's cultural profile in order to shore up its commercial interests. As early as 1931 Rex Leeper, the founder of the British Council, stated that he had 'taken over a new sphere of activity – known, for want of a better name, as 'cultural propaganda''.<sup>10</sup> Alongside increased international competition from France, America, Germany, and Italy, the 1930s brought the British Empire face-to-face with a range of depression-era challenges such as contracting world trade, falling commodity prices, and soaring domestic unemployment.<sup>11</sup> The British Council's earliest incarnation as 'British Committee for Relations with Other Countries' (1934-1936) sought to use culture to redress the impact of such crises. Although its earliest practices were intended to help raise private funds for independent commercial interests, as the 1930s progressed and the global crisis in capitalism deepened into a political crisis in Liberal Democracy itself, the British state began to take fuller and more direct control of cultural diplomacy.<sup>12</sup>

Increasing international competition and the on-going depression in world trade began to alter the Empire's free-market characteristics, with modern advertising methods eventually brought in to publicise a 'Third British Empire' of closely integrated

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<sup>9</sup> In Donaldson, pp. 55-56.

<sup>10</sup> In Donaldson, pp. 15-19.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the period see, Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London: Pimlico, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, pp. 418-75; Brendon, *The Dark Valley*, pp. 353-73.



Dominion and Empire trade.<sup>13</sup> The Empire Marketing Board (EMB, 1926-1933) pressed the 'virtues and values' of imperial trade upon the British public through a wide range of visual media. However, despite its efforts in raising the British public's Empire conscience in order to shape domestic patterns of consumption, there was divergence between metropolitan and colonial opinions towards the EMB's efforts. *The Times'* criticism that it was a 'futile and wasteful institution' was publically rebuffed by the South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts, who hailed it as 'the one bright spot in recent Empire policy'.<sup>14</sup>

The British Council was formed immediately following the disbandment of the EMB and its outgoing Secretary Stephen Tallents provided the blueprint for the new organisation in his influential pamphlet *The Projection of England* (1933). Tallents stated that:

No civilised country can today afford either to neglect the projection of its national personality, or to resign its projection to others [...] peace itself may at any time depend upon a clear understanding abroad of her actions and motives [...] in the borderland which lies between Government and private enterprise, a school of national projection.<sup>15</sup>

Tallents's pamphlet attempted to sanitise the notion of propaganda by employing the American term 'public relations'. This was necessitated by the common perception throughout the 1920s and 1930s that Britain's press had indulged in excessive and damaging propaganda during the First World War; not to mention the word's association with the activities of both the Communist International or Comintern (1919-1943) and

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<sup>13</sup> John Darwin, 'A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century*, ed. by Judith Brown and Wm Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 64-87.

<sup>14</sup> In Stephen Constantine, *Buy and Build: The Advertising Posters of the Empire Marketing Board* (London: Public Records Office, 1986), p. 1; Stephen Constantine, "Bringing the Empire Alive: The Empire Marketing Board and Imperial Propaganda, 1926-33", in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 192-231 (p. 192); Melanie Horton, *The Empire Marketing Board Posters* (London: Scala Publishing, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Tallents, p. 76.

Fascist excesses.<sup>16</sup> Though articulating a bold and visionary Liberal-Democratic equivalent, Tallents's ideas were none-the-less freighted with problematic political and institutional implications.<sup>17</sup> His vision of an orchestrated and inter-connecting 'borderland' of public bodies such as the press, the BBC, and the British film industry, advertising Britain abroad would centralise control and strengthen the political intelligentsia's hold on the nation's culture industries. The potential for replicating the kinds of state-directed propaganda apparatus enjoyed by more autocratic regimes is one of British cultural diplomacy's more problematic characteristics, though the generally decentralised institutional structure of 'British Information Services' is usually hailed as an important formal distinction.<sup>18</sup>

A third, technologically driven pro-imperial cultural initiative can be seen in the formation of the BBC's Empire Service (1932-1939), the precursor to its Overseas Service (1939-1965) and today's World Service (1965-present). Although initially aimed at strengthening links across the British Dominions and Dependencies through the provision of English language content, from 1938 the Empire Service also began foreign language broadcasting. Its initial intention of strengthening imperial ties morphed into international security concerns, and ultimately counterpropaganda initiatives against both hostile foreign powers and parts of Empire agitating for independence, such as India. Initially as a direct countermeasure to Italy's anti-British broadcasts across the

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<sup>16</sup> The exaggerated quality and assumed falsity of the British press' First World War atrocity stories have recently been called into question. See, John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For Comintern activities and the often clandestine spread of Soviet cultural influence throughout Europe and America during the interwar period, see Katerina Clark, *Moscow, The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (London: Harper Collins, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Scott Anthony, *Public Relations and the Making of Modern Britain: Stephen Tallents and the Birth of a Progressive Media Profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 8-17.

<sup>18</sup> On the shifting fortunes of cultural diplomacy within the decentralised structure of Britain's Information Services see, Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: John Murray, 2001); W. Scott Lucas, 'Beyond Freedom, Beyond Control: Approaches to Culture and the State-Private Network in the Cold War', in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960*, ed. by Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 53-108.

Mediterranean basin following its invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935, the Empire Services radio began to broadcast pro-British counterpropaganda throughout the Middle East in Arabic from 3 January 1938, in Spanish and Portuguese across South America from April 1938, and in a variety of languages across Europe from September 1938 onwards.<sup>19</sup> A number of prominent left-wing intellectual figures such as George Orwell worked in the Overseas Service during this period, illustrating how anti-imperialist sentiments were often subordinated to pressing national security and anti-totalitarian concerns at the time.<sup>20</sup>

The D'Abernon Report, the EMB, and the BBC's Empire Service, provide economic, advertising, and technological instances where Britain's initial uses of cultural diplomacy sprang from imperial concerns before then transforming into the more 'enemy led' initiatives most often recognised and celebrated today. In the post-war era, the notion of a Britishness that defined itself against continental Fascism would succeed forgotten interwar attempts at establishing one based on overt Dominion and Empire consciousness. Notwithstanding this, the 1930s sense that cultural diplomacy could play a large part in maintaining the indivisible links between Britain's imperial stature and its domestic security and well-being would continue to gather pace long into the post-war era of decolonisation and the Cold War.

### **Elite Diplomacy vs. Mass Propaganda: Lord Lloyd and Lord Beaverbrook**

Lord Lloyd, whose career bridged colonial administration and the birth of the British Council, provides a compelling biographical illustration of the stringently pro-imperial and anti-Communist attitudes found at the head of the new cultural propaganda

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<sup>19</sup> Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 15-17; John M. Mackenzie, 'In Touch With the Infinite: The BBC and Empire, 1923-53', in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, pp. 192-231; Simon J. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> For a special edition on the political and intellectual character of the BBC and Bush House in the 1930s, see Marie Gillespie, 'Writers at Bush House' *Wasafiri*, 26.4, (2011), 1-3.

departments that emerged in the 1930s. As its second Chairman from 1937 to 1941, Lloyd came to the British Council following a long and controversial career in colonial administration, prompting the British Council historian Frances Donaldson to characterise him as being an imperialist ‘of the Curzon type’ who believed in ‘the inscrutable decrees of Providence’ placed upon ‘the shoulders of the British race’.<sup>21</sup> Following an authoritarian Governorship of Bombay between 1918 and 1923 during which he imprisoned Mahatma Gandhi, Lloyd was promoted to High Commissioner of Egypt in 1925 where his intransigence alienated the Wafd Nationalist Party to the point that the Foreign Office were forced to negotiate behind his back, forcing Lloyd’s early resignation in 1929.<sup>22</sup> Donaldson notes that establishing the importance of cultural propaganda through his work at the British Council was a return from the political wilderness for Lloyd, providing an outlet for his ‘energy and talents’ as well as satisfying both his ‘romantic imperialism’ and ‘intolerance of radical philosophy’.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike Tallents and most subsequent British Council chairmen, Lloyd was not afraid of describing the British Council’s work unequivocally as propaganda. He is credited however with giving the British version a more respectable gloss by explicitly defining it against the Nazi German and Fascist Italian varieties. In a speech to the House of Commons, Lloyd assured that:

everywhere we find people turning in relief from the harshly dominant tones of totalitarian propaganda to the less insistent but more reasonable cadences of Britain. We do not force them to ‘think British’; we offer them the opportunity to learn what the British think.<sup>24</sup>

Lloyd’s emphasis on ‘reasonable cadence’ was the adoption of a seemingly magnanimous, take-it-or-leave-it, attitude towards cultural exchange. He espoused a long-historical view

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<sup>21</sup> In Donaldson, p. 47. For Lord Lloyd’s biography, see Colin Forbes Adam, *Life of Lord Lloyd* (London: Macmillan, 1948); and Charmley.

<sup>22</sup> Brendon, *Decline and Fall*, p. 325.

<sup>23</sup> Donaldson, pp. 46-51; Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, p. 168.

<sup>24</sup> In Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, pp. 177-78.

that interpreted culture as heritage (a conservative notion which also helped align Shakespeare with traditional structures of state power) as well as placing greater emphasis on English language education as a strategy for attracting the best foreign students in order to secure Britain's commercial links as advantageously as possible. With all of these elements, Lloyd's biographer credits him with laying the foundations for British cultural diplomacy in the post-war era.<sup>25</sup>

To what extent did Lloyd's presence at the birth of Britain's cultural-diplomatic institutions help establish the kinds of pro-imperial and anti-Bolshevik outlook that would be prevalent during the Cold War? By the time of his death in 1941, Lloyd was Secretary of State for the Colonies whilst continuing to maintain direct influence over the British Council, a clear indication of just how interrelated those two roles were. In fact, Lloyd defined and expanded the British Council's remit into previous Colonial Department areas as he preferred the 'semi-official' body of the British Council for certain tasks.<sup>26</sup> One such task was using his frequent overseas visits setting up British Institutes across Mediterranean Europe, the Near East, and the Baltic states, as a front for exploiting his considerable network of political contacts. With Lloyd able to claim figures such as General Franco as close personal friends, his role at the British Council provided a direct, informal, and covert channel of communication between Churchill and a range of prominent continental leaders.<sup>27</sup>

As the first foreign visitor to be received at Spain's Royal Palace towards the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Lloyd's meeting with General Franco on 23 October 1938 was ostensibly to push for the British Council to start work in Madrid. Informally however, he was seeking to persuade Spain to stay out of any future European conflict by emphasising, in deliberate contrast to Germany's recent

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<sup>25</sup> Forbes Adam, p. 282.

<sup>26</sup> Charmley, pp. 251-62.

<sup>27</sup> Charmley, pp. 217-41.

accommodation with Russia, Britain and Spain's deeply shared anti-Communism sentiments. Conflating political, imperial, and cultural policy, Lloyd felt that by increasing its artistic, linguistic, and intellectual presence across the region Britain was pursuing 'a crusade for the salvation of civilisation against paganism' and that with such a strategy 'the anti-Communist field is ours for the taking'.<sup>28</sup> This extant concern with fighting Bolshevism shaped much of Lloyd's political thinking and given his previous postings, signals the continuing legacy of Britain's early twentieth century countermeasures against the spread of Communism internationally. Lloyd was clearly shaped and motivated by the proto-Cold War geopolitics of the interwar years that saw Britain countering the Bolsheviks' advances within the fringes of its own Empire.<sup>29</sup> As an indication of just how much shared anti-Communist sentiments aligned Lloyd with Franco, he was offered the position of Ambassador to Spain on 19 April 1939 as a reciprocal gesture to the French sending Marshal Petain (later Chief of State for Vichy France) to Madrid as Special Ambassador. When war did break out however, Lloyd came to represent the most right-wing element in Churchill's coalition government, serving as Colonial Minister at the time.<sup>30</sup> Suggestive of how the British Council's overt cultural activities could be considered to be of less importance than its covert political uses, Churchill needed to be dissuaded from shutting the organisation down altogether following Lloyd's death in 1941.<sup>31</sup> With his broad political connections and ability to secure treasury funding (under Lloyd's tenure the British Council's grant rose from £5,000 in 1935/6 to £330,249 by 1939/40), British Council historians claim that Lloyd ensured the organisation's existence and the 'permanent recognition' of 'cultural propaganda' in British foreign policy from

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<sup>28</sup> Charmley, p. 230.

<sup>29</sup> Many of Britain's earliest contests with the Communist International took place within, or at the fringes of, its Empire following Europe and America's 'containment' of Russia following the 1917 revolution. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 22. For examples of such Comintern activities during the interwar years see, Westad, pp. 49-57; Peter Hopkirk *Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin's Dream of an Empire in Asia* (London: John Murray, 1984).

<sup>30</sup> Charmley, p. 240.

<sup>31</sup> Reviewing the British Council's position at the time, Churchill stated that 'on the whole I am inclined to think that its usefulness ended with the death of Lord Lloyd'. In Donaldson, p. 79.

then on.<sup>32</sup> Lloyd's pro-imperial and anti-Communist politics, not to mention his close and lasting friendship with autocratic dictators like Franco, undermines any claim that Britain's initial forays into cultural projection can be summarised as being either reluctant or predominantly anti-Fascist in character.

Before moving on to discuss the Old Vic's 1939 production of *Hamlet*, it is important to also note the strong domestic criticism that targeted the 'elitist' image of the British Council's earliest cultural activities. Many public broadsides were launched against Shakespeare tours in the popular press owned by Lord Beaverbrook, Britain's previous Minister of Information during the First World War. A later, though typical Beaverbrook attack, stated:

Which is the best propaganda for us – the roar of [...] British bombers and fighters, or the melody of madrigals broadcast by the British Council? If we saved the money we wasted by the council, we could have three extra squadrons of fighters to join the display.<sup>33</sup>

British Council staff would long suffer under Beaverbrook's systematic portrayal of them in the press as privileged hobbyists, 'effete and ineffectual amateurs', or 'precious cultural dilettantes' bringing untold damage to 'Britain's robust picture of itself abroad' as a nation of 'tough, no-nonsense islanders'.<sup>34</sup> Although there has been speculation about the motives behind Beaverbrook's long running hostility toward the organisation (ranging from obscure personal vindictiveness to disappointment that he didn't get Lloyd's job himself), it is evident that Beaverbrook's attacks illustrate a deep schism in ideas between mass and elite forms of propaganda.<sup>35</sup> In the initial stages of the First World War, British propaganda followed the typical Foreign Office strategy of being qualitative rather than quantitative. It aimed to 'influence those who can influence others', rather than

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<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Rose, *Superior Person* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 96; Corse, p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> In Donaldson, p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> In Donaldson, p. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Taylor, *Selling Democracy*, p. 52.

attempting ‘a direct appeal to the mass of the population’.<sup>36</sup> As such attempts failed to avert conflict, Lloyd George established the Enemy Propaganda Department in February 1918 under the direction of Lord Northcliffe (owner of *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Mirror*). He also promoted Lord Beaverbrook (owner the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard*) to the position of Minister of Information. Taylor’s summary that this ‘Press Gang’ muzzled the domestic press, fabricated stories of German atrocities, and inadvertently damaged foreign policy after the war, was true of public perceptions in the late 1930s, though recent studies such as Horne and Kramer’s have led contemporary historians to reassess such claims.<sup>37</sup>

In 1939, rather than seeing the ‘national poet’ as a possible tool for mass mobilisation the British Council’s policy was to present Shakespeare as an exemplary figure of transnational high culture, and as an effective vehicle for engaging other decision-making elites directly. In effect this was a return to the traditional and preferred Foreign Office strategy that Beaverbrook’s ‘Press Gang’ had replaced in 1918. Consequently, although the British Council followed a strategy of touring the best available British Shakespeare productions in order to reach influential foreign audiences, Beaverbrook lambasted such activities as a waste of taxpayer’s money, and exposed the state-subsidy of such ‘elitist’ cultural activities to the unwanted scrutiny of wider public opinions through the national press.<sup>38</sup>

### **Tyrone Guthrie’s *Hamlet* at The Old Vic (1939)**

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<sup>36</sup> Taylor, *Selling Democracy*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Taylor, *Selling Democracy*, p. 52; On the Allied press’ representation of ‘German Atrocities’ in World War One, see Horne and Kramer, pp. 204-11.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, Beaverbrook brought to light the £1000 visit of six Spanish-nationalist newspaper editors to Britain in the summer of 1939. Expenses included chartered planes, accommodation at Mayfair hotels, and dinners at Claridge’s. Donaldson, p. 66.



The Old Vic's 1939 Mediterranean tour of Portugal, Italy, Egypt, Greece, and Malta was one of the British Council's earliest successes.<sup>39</sup> It was organised by the honorary dramatic advisor Mr Bridges-Adams, who had previous experience touring Shakespeare productions outside of London in an attempt to foster the popular audiences felt necessary for the eventual establishment of an English National Theatre.<sup>40</sup> The Old Vic took eight productions abroad, the leading one being Tyrone Guthrie's modern dress production of *Hamlet* starring Alec Guinness, with Anthony Quayle's *Henry V* providing the other half of the tour's Shakespeare programme.<sup>41</sup> Guthrie's staging was viewed as a bold and stylish attempt at contemporising *Hamlet* and bringing it into the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> Guinness was a young, unknown actor following tentatively in the footsteps of John Gielgud's and Laurence Olivier's 1936 and 1937 portrayals. The strongest influence on the staging however, was Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory production from 1925. Jackson's '*Hamlet* in plus-fours' was the first modern-dress presentation of the play, and generated global publicity from Canada to South Africa and India.<sup>43</sup> It demonstrated how stage interpretations of *Hamlet* in the interwar period entered a pluralistic, cosmopolitan community that made competing claims on the playwright.

As the 1939 Old Vic production encountered many foreign Shakespeare productions whilst touring (some with a strongly autocratic flavour), it is germane to consider how Guthrie's production sought to define itself as a distinctively British

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<sup>39</sup> Much shorter visits were the norm prior to this, such as The John Gielgud Company's performance of *Hamlet* at Kronborg Castle in Elsinor, Denmark in 1939. See Jonathan Croall, *John Gielgud, Matinee Idol to Movie Star* (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), pp. 261-63.

<sup>40</sup> His New Shakespeare Company toured uncut productions across Britain earning him the nickname 'Un-a-Bridged' Adams. Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon Books, 2013), p. 112. As its director from 1919 to 1934, Bridge-Adams also established the Stratford-upon-Avon festival's international status, before going on to become dramatic advisor to the British Council from 1937 to 1944. Robert Speaight, ed., *A Bridge-Adams Letter Book*, (London: The Society for Theatrical Research Press, 1971), pp. 11-28.

<sup>41</sup> The company also played Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775), George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1903), J. B. Priestley's *I Have Been Here Before* (1937), Arthur Wing Pinero's *Trelawny of the Wells* (1898), Norman Ginsbury's *Viceroy Sarab* (1936), and Edward Woolf's *Libel* (1934). Diana Devlin, *A Speaking Part: Lewis Casson and the Theatre of his Time* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), p. 194.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Quayle, *A Time To Speak* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1990), p. 192.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony B. Dawson, *Shakespeare in Performance: Hamlet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 83.

version within this crowded international field. Firstly, besides hoping to generate a similar wave of publicity to that enjoyed by the Birmingham Repertory some fourteen years earlier, modern dress suited the ensemble playing style then favoured at the Old Vic. It allowed 'minor' characters to take on more subtlety and complexity than was usually afforded when the play was staged as a 'star' vehicle. It also helped legitimise the faster, naturalistic form of verse speaking championed by influential modernist reformers such as William Poel and Harley Granville-Barker. Guthrie's modern treatment of *Hamlet* was able to accommodate a more psychologically flawed portrayal of a Prince who displayed an ugly and violent temper, especially towards Gertrude and Ophelia. Guinness's still, understated, and naturalistic performance was punctuated with moments of explosive rage and anger; a Freudian reading that traditional and romantic interpretations such as Gielgud's could not get close to portraying.<sup>44</sup> Following on from Olivier's developments, Guinness's interpretation epitomised his generation's desire to move ever-further from the populist Edwardian organ-roll delivery and conventional staging and costumes that commonly characterised British Shakespeare productions of the 1930s.

Guinness's portrayal divided the London critics, with Harold Hobson in *The Observer* stating that he had 'never seen a better young Hamlet', whilst James Agate for *The Sunday Times* dismissed Guinness's interpretation as 'non-acting':

This young actor is obviously not trying any of the things in *Hamlet* which are the ABC of the part. He attempts neither play of feature nor gesture. He rejects mordancy.<sup>45</sup>

Given such a mixed response, Kenneth Tynan concluded that the production:

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<sup>44</sup> Dawson, p. 96. Whilst Gielgud's was sensitive and romantic, Olivier gave a more Freudian interpretation, portraying a man of action inexplicably blocked from exacting revenge. According to Dawson's stage history, 'both displayed a heightened passion and instability, a fierceness struck down by melancholic paralysis (a psychological condition pertinent to 1930s depression culture)'. Dawson, pp. 116-17.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Read, *Alec Guinness: The Authorised Biography* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), p. 83.

bestowed upon his name an aura of civilised controversy [...] he eschewed conventional flourishes; the whole performance [...] marked his independence of the past.<sup>46</sup>

As Tynan suggests, Guthrie's production sought to insist on the relevance and modernity of the play, with the audience encountering a Hamlet who was recognisable in his complexity and concerns. Contemporising Shakespeare also required an emphasis on domesticity within the setting of naturalistically rendered drawing rooms, a familiar interwar context that chimed with the popular theme of generational conflict. Guthrie's production made tentative nods towards the political concerns agitating continental interpretations. Guinness wore his father-in-law's World War I dress uniform, suggesting lingering disillusionment over the legacy of that conflict and troubling audiences with the memory of their fathers' lost generation. In the graveyard scene Hamlet wore a sweater and workman's boots, an echo of Karel Hilar and Vlatislav Hofman's Prague production that played down Hamlet's princely stature and established his distance and alienation from the centres of power.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Old Vic Company's *Hamlet* in Portugal (1939)**

Although selected to undertake the Mediterranean tour, the Old Vic's staging of *Hamlet* was just one of many available British productions at the time. The choice may well have been to do with the youthfulness of its company overall, as this was a commonly noted feature that helped differentiate it within a crowded international field. In contrast to a British theatrical culture that was predominantly shaped by market forces and the pressures of commercial competition, continental productions could be the result of

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<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Tynan, *Alec Guinness* (London: Salisbury Square, 1953), p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> A number of continental interwar portrayals freighted *Hamlet* with political concerns. Leopold Jessner's anti-monarchist and anti-militarist production in Berlin 1926 'created a storm in the provincial assembly' with Fritz Kortner's Hamlet embodying the expressionist themes of 'the sensitive individual crushed by the mindless machine of authority'. In Prague, Karel Hilar and Vlatislav Hofman's *Hamlet* was 'impotent within [a] hostile, often grotesque world' that spoke to the 'alienation and resentment of Central Europe's post-war generation'. Dawson, p. 117.

generous state funding and often became quite monumental in effect. A striking example of the Fascist appetite for this grander approach to mounting Shakespeare was the unprecedented popularity for translations and productions of *Julius Caesar* across Portugal, Italy, and Spain. In Italy especially, the play became instrumental in Mussolini's ideological appropriation of the 'Caesar myth'.<sup>48</sup> The Fascist adaptation of Shakespeare went so far as seeing Mussolini debuting as a dramatist himself, with his state-supported productions undertaking international tours of their own.<sup>49</sup> The final instalment of Mussolini's trilogy, the tragedy *Cesare* (1939), coincided closely with the timing of the Old Vic tour, though Guthrie's *Hamlet* could not have been more different. Premiering in April 1939, *Cesare* presented a biased revision of Shakespeare's more complex historical perspective by portraying Brutus as immature, dithering, and confused. This rather Hamlet-esque presentation of vacillating youth suffered in comparison to Mussolini's Caesar who was characterised as the archetypal Fascist man of action.<sup>50</sup> In a complete contrast to the Old Vic's *Hamlet*, Mussolini's *Cesare* provided an absorbing spectacle of charismatic despotic power betrayed by treasonous intellectualism.

In contrast to such state sanctioned hero-worship, and in keeping with British attempts at distinguishing their own cultural propaganda as something refreshingly light and uncontrived, much of the Old Vic tour's publicity emphasised 'youth' as a vibrant and defining characteristic of the London theatre scene. Defending the production's tour on the BBC, Lewis Casson (then Chairman of the British Council's DAC, tour leader, and actor) insisted that it was good for the Italians to 'see that we have a new generation

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<sup>48</sup> Keith Gregor, ed., *Shakespeare and Tyranny: Regimes of Reading in Europe and Beyond* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> The first production was titled *Campo di Maggio* (1930) and premiered in Rome before undertaking an international circuit of Berlin, Paris, Vienna, London, and New York. The final instalment, the tragedy *Cesare* (1939), premiered just after the Old Vic tour in April, receiving 'huge government funding' and full support from 'the state apparatus' in order to validate 'its cultural importance'. It was due to tour internationally at the outbreak of the Second World War. Michele De Benedictis, 'Crossing the Rubicon in Fascist Italy: Mussolini and Theatrical Caesarism from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*', in *Shakespeare and Tyranny*, pp. 105-26 (pp. 114-15).

<sup>50</sup> Benedictis, pp. 116-17.

of [...] vigorous youngsters who are going to carry on the theatre tradition'.<sup>51</sup> In one of the earliest entries in her personal diary of the tour, Merula Guinness also remarked that 'Guthrie is becoming quite a God: they [...] are amazed he is so young. They are amazed at the youthfulness of the company altogether'.<sup>52</sup> Italian audiences seemed responsive to the pathos that such an emphasis on youth could evoke, with Contessa Marcella Pavolini writing a letter to Guinness asserting that she found his performance

a marvellous experience, a revelation of the real, human, intelligent, and immensely unhappy Prince. You were so young, so helpless, so lost, among those worldly, stupid and selfish people, it made my heart ache to see you and to listen to you; I couldn't even get up from my seat, during the intervals, I trembled so much – and I was not a sensitive, emotional girl, but a woman forty years old.<sup>53</sup>

Although acknowledging receipt of the way in which the production so effectively delivered an anti-war message of 'doomed youth', the erotic charge in Guinness's fan mail also reveals some intriguing sexual politics. In professing herself to be so greatly won over by Guinness's portrayal, the Contessa's letter performs a seduction of its own; a reminder that within the world of cultural diplomacy influence worked both ways.

Although the impending sense of international conflict coloured the production's reception, hindsight allowed many accounts to overstate its inevitability. Anthony Quayle's autobiography *A Time to Speak* (1990) is particularly vivid in this regard, stating that no one in the company 'doubted that war was coming; our anxiety was to get *Hamlet* on before the bombs fell'.<sup>54</sup> Alec Guinness recalled immediate signs of antagonism towards the company in Fascist Europe. Along with the forty-two cast members, twelve tons of stage materials needed to be transported. Arriving in Lisbon aboard the *Alcantara* on 23 January, the company

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<sup>51</sup> In Devlin, pp. 195-96.

<sup>52</sup> The British Library (BL), MS 89015/1/4/1, Merula Guinness' Old Vic Tour Diary 1939, vol. 1., 4 February 1939.

<sup>53</sup> In Read, p. 86.

<sup>54</sup> Quayle, p. 192.

watched in horror as all our scenery was carefully lowered into the Tagus [...] It was probably a genuine error on the part of the crane workers but the British were far from popular in Portugal.<sup>55</sup>

All accounts confirm that the company immediately found themselves immersed in pro-Fascist celebrations following the fall of Barcelona to Franco's army:

Lisbon went mad with joy. We found it very depressing. Even more depressing was seeing the grander makes of British cars displaying the Union Jack flanked by the Swastika, the Rising Sun of Japan, as well as the flags of Nationalist Spain and Portugal.<sup>56</sup>

Casson claimed that almost everyone they met was pro-Franco and happy that the 'red menace' had been crushed, whilst Guinness stated that the company felt 'small, alien, lonely and threatened'.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, and in marked contrast to Lloyd's personal friendship with Franco or Casson's officious belief in the tour's mission of appeasement, Guinness remembered the company beginning to feel 'not a little suspicious of our fellow countrymen in Lisbon'.<sup>58</sup> Under such dramatic circumstances, political tensions between the Old Vic's jobbing actors and British Council organisers began to surface.

Expatriate English support for the Fascist cause troubled the company, making their role as cultural propagandists difficult. Merula Guinness's private account describes in lively and unguarded terms how a mental distance was maintained between the performers, the propaganda, and many of the tour's supporters and administrators. Following a performance of *Henry V* before the Portuguese President and various international ambassadors she noted that 'Alec [was] extremely good, Tony very

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<sup>55</sup> Devlin, p. 194; Guinness, pp. 18-19

<sup>56</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 1., 25 January 1939. Franco's Fascist regime was immediately given formal recognition by the British state in February 1939.

<sup>57</sup> Devlin, p. 195; Guinness, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Guinness, p. 19.

charming' but that 'Casson made an embarrassing speech'.<sup>59</sup> The atmosphere at the British Institute in Lisbon was:

very proud. V. Serious about it all, and serious about Lisbon. They are giving lectures on the plays we are doing. Place plastered in Old Vic propaganda [...] We don't like the B.I. Boys. Little scruffy one [...] a fascist, awfully proud of his superiors – wears pork pie hat, thinks he owns Lisbon, very self important. The other one very ponderous and pompous [...] we don't like Lisbon, we don't like the Portuguese, and we don't like the British people in Portugal.<sup>60</sup>

Though surprising in its frankness, Merula Guinness's diary evidences the personal challenges faced by theatre artists embroiled, somewhat unwittingly, in the realities of the twilight world of propaganda and international politics just prior to the outbreak of war. The evolution of her ideas in response to the touring experience suggests something of the personal jeopardy involved in undertaking such cultural diplomacy. As such it is worth sketching out a little of her background here, in order to trace the impact of the tour upon her thinking.

Merula Guinness's cultural and political sensibility could be described as a typical form of late-1930s disenchanted bohemianism. She was not politically active but, in a typical iconoclastic gesture of the time, looked to 'art' to provide a strategic refuge from the multiple challenges of modern life during the interwar years. The Salamans, her British South African Jewish family, were a lively example of upper-class eccentricity, with a country estate near Essex where her father was both chief of the hunt and personal friend to the painter Augustus John. Likewise, her mother enjoyed civilised controversy by being widely regarded as a drawing room Communist and fellow traveller. Although one of Alec Guinness's biographers asserts that Merula did not share her mother's politics, the association of class and wealth with 'high' culture seems to have

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<sup>59</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 1., 25 January, 28 January 1939.

<sup>60</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 1., 28 January, 27 January 1939.

been one of her chief annoyances.<sup>61</sup> Despite her privileged class position Merula's Jewish background barred her from the very top enclaves of British society, with establishment anti-Semitism ensuring that she was denied access to the most exclusive girls school of the day, Hayes Court.<sup>62</sup> In classic bohemian fashion, Merula Guinness was independently wealthy enough to survive on a young actress' salary, yet dissenting enough to resent the patronage required to protect her art from the vicissitudes of the open market.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, her young husband Alec came from a lower-middle-class background and had no independent income beyond the little that acting work paid at the time. Guinness rehearsed *Hamlet* in the only suit he owned, the same one he wore at their wedding just prior to the tour (which also served as an unconventional honeymoon). Despite his modest income, vanity and status anxiety got the better of him, and Guinness blew a month's salary on a Savile Row suit just in time for opening night of Guthrie's 'modern dress' production. Merula Guinness's notions that art could dignify poverty, form a spiritual bulwark against the vulgar and uncultured consumption habits of the wealthy, and shelter the practitioner from the political extremes of the period, were all seriously tested during the Mediterranean tour of *Hamlet*.<sup>64</sup> Her muted rage at the vulgar elites they were underpaid to entice towards democratic civic responsibility through Shakespeare was given much outlet in the pages of her tour diary.

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<sup>61</sup> Read, p. 88.

<sup>62</sup> Read, p. 88.

<sup>63</sup> Following the First World War, most theatres viewed Shakespeare as 'commercial death' with 'no West End actor' wanting 'to be called Shakespearean'. According to the actress Margret Scudamore, upper-class credentials were essential for getting on the West End stage. Michael Redgrave, *In My Mind's Eye* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. 60.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Fussell notes how the near-ubiquitous British desire for travel between the wars was curtailed by withdrawal from the gold standard in 1931. The resentment of figures like Merula Guinness towards the wealthy 'patrons' of the Old Vic Tour, suggests that the bohemian affectation of embracing poverty in order to create art had become uncomfortably literal for the British middle classes during the 1930s. Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 50-64. On how the class-cultural contradictions of English bohemianism were further exacerbated during the domestic tribulations of the 1930s, see Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 2nd edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 439-64. On the longer history of continental bohemianism's transfer to Britain, see Virginia Nicholson, *Among The Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).



### The Old Vic Company's *Hamlet* in Italy (1939)

In sharp contrast to the political heat of Portugal, Merula Guinness felt that Italian audiences were 'tremendously fond of the theatre – refreshingly enthusiastic' and showed 'genuine appreciation' for the Old Vic's work.<sup>65</sup> On 6 February 1939, the company of actors were officially welcomed by the President of the Federazione Nazionale Fascista. His combative tone displayed a clear understanding of the British Council's propagandist intentions in bringing the Old Vic to Italy, and countered them with a startling array of Fascist counterclaims, stressing how Italian theatre was achieving mass mobilisation on the grandest of scales:

It was one of the first points to be considered by the Fascist government, as soon as it took the lead of the nation, to find in the theatre a foundational element for the spiritual education of the people, and it has established a Ministry for Popular Culture [...] thus we have arranged great representations for audiences of over 20,000 [...] 'Carri di Tespi' [...] do what your ancient companies of 'strollers' did, but with modern direction and perfectly equipped, which have caused wonder and cheers everywhere amongst the peasantry [...] of seeing a show which formerly was a privilege of the high classes.<sup>66</sup>

Lloyd's difference in cadence and tone between British and Italian propaganda is illustrated here, though the strengths of Beaverbrook's criticism of the ineffective limitations of elite propaganda also comes through. While Britain was hoping to influence key decision-makers through Shakespeare, those very people were already boasting about how socially progressive they were being in mobilising 'the peasantry' through the deliberate dissemination of an art form that was previously 'a privilege of the high classes'.<sup>67</sup> Following this jibe at Britain's antiquated, class-bound links between

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<sup>65</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1. vol. 1., 4 February, 8 February 1939.

<sup>66</sup> Anon, 'Address to the Artists of the Old Vic Company by the President of the Federazione Nazionale Fascista', 6 February 1939. This formal speech to the company was printed into a booklet and handed out to all company members. Merula Guinness' copy is attached to BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Anon, 'Address to the Artists', 6 February 1939.

culture and privilege, the Old Vic cast displayed a mixture of polite embarrassment and cool indifference towards both British and Italian forms of political grandstanding:

Casson read his [speech], only ¼ hour long but most embarrassing, luckily the Italians didn't understand a word, then it got quite gay [...] a very strange performance. Most of them had just finished playing *Hamlet* here, very badly I believe.<sup>68</sup>

Although the actors were aware that there had been a simultaneous Italian production of the same play, they were happy to brush any hint of competition aside with studied indifference. Italy was full of such mirroring cultural encounters, however. Guinness's scheduled rendezvous to take tea with Mussolini was cancelled after Pope Pius XI died whilst the company was in Florence and by the time they reached the Valle Theatre, Rome was in official mourning. He recalled that 'it was a curious experience playing *Hamlet*, in conventional 'nighted colours' in spite of the modern dress, before an audience entirely swathed in black'.<sup>69</sup> Invited to a Rome production of *Macbeth* performed by Ruggero Ruggeri, Casson was also surprised at how successfully the Italian actor underplayed the villainous aspects of the character by employing a 'solemn and serious' approach that succeeded in portraying Macbeth in a Fascist mode, as 'a sort of troubled Saint'.<sup>70</sup> Such differing interpretations provided the company with clear instances of how effectively Shakespeare in performance could be shaped to promote an alternative world-view. As Richard Halpern has noted, Shakespeare was a firm cultural favourite 'of both left and right in the age of mass politics' and was the most frequently produced foreign playwright by both the Soviet regime and Nazi-Germany during the 1930s and the war years.<sup>71</sup> Rather than inducing a sense of unease over his own culpability in leading a

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<sup>68</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 1., 6 February 1939.

<sup>69</sup> Guinness, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Devlin, pp. 195-97.

<sup>71</sup> In Italy at the time all British playwrights, other than Shakespeare and Shaw, were boycotted on the Italian stage. Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 52.

propagandist Shakespeare tour himself, Casson merely viewed such interpretations as unorthodox curiosities.<sup>72</sup>

In the twilight world of cultural diplomacy it was difficult for the actors to gauge the depth of genuine feeling behind the many public endorsements that the Old Vic's *Hamlet* enjoyed in Italy. Although Alec and Merula Guinness appreciated their time in Italy the most and felt the Italian love of Shakespeare to be genuine, Quayle insisted that such warm receptions were carefully stage-managed pieces of political theatre in-and-of themselves. He recalled how crowds stood and clapped when the company simply walked into a restaurant. Although they were 'feted and entertained', with 'the intelligentsia coo[ing]' the company 'like doves' the atmosphere felt 'forced', especially with 'the ever-growing strains' of the Fascist hymn *Giovinezza* playing in the background.<sup>73</sup> Although the British Council interpreted such displays as proof of its diplomatic success, Quayle refuted any notion that they overcame the simmering political tensions beneath the surface. In contrast to Lloyd's rhetoric at the opening of British Institutes at the time, Quayle felt his ears 'stuffed with hot air' at a reception at the PEN club in Milan when the:

hosts expressed their horror at the very thought that the country of Michelangelo and the nation that had given birth to Shakespeare should ever confront one another in enmity.<sup>74</sup>

In summary we can say that immediately upon disembarkation, the actors began to realise the jeopardy of engaging in cultural diplomacy. The limit to the tour's core strategy of using Shakespeare to influence foreign elites was quickly exposed on a number of levels. Close contact and accommodation with pro-Fascist elites, not to mention the pressure of partaking in celebrations over the fall of the Spanish Republic,

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<sup>72</sup> Devlin, p. 197.

<sup>73</sup> Quayle, p. 194. Giuseppe Blanc's *Giovinezza* (1909) was adapted and appropriated into a Fascist hymn and became the unofficial Italian National Anthem between 1924 and 1943. George Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), p. 92.

<sup>74</sup> Quayle, p. 194.

contradicted many of the company's personal political beliefs and values. Rather than extolling peace, they came to realise that many of their fellow countrymen and even members of the tour's administration were happy to accommodate Fascist advances. Within such a context of strident militarism, the tour's message of appeasement seemed weak and disingenuous. Although the Old Vic tourists saw their propaganda efforts encouraged and politely applauded in Italy, Shakespeare's impact was limited as it had already been effectively appropriated and recruited by the very causes they were hoping to deploy it against. Italy boasted that while the British were finally taking the necessary steps to use their national culture as propaganda, they had already gone much further, levelled Europe's elitist cultural divisions and established a theatre for the 'spiritual education' of the masses. The initial projection of theatrical culture overseas exposed many of Britain's own limitations, from a lack of social relevance given the prevalence of archaic class-cultural associations, to the destructive vicissitudes and creative limitations of its depression-era marketplace. In 1939, a pro-British *Hamlet* confronted a range of Mediterranean pro-Fascist Shakespeares and history suggests that in Portugal and Italy at least, the latter prevailed.

### **Anglo-Egyptian Relations**

By the end of the 1930s Egypt had grown to become an integral part of Britain's world system. Late Victorian expansion in the region had led to massive infrastructural investment including the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the Cairo Opera House as an attendant cultural symbol. During the ensuing boom period, Egypt enjoyed the international reputation of being a dynamic satellite economy on the periphery of Europe, whilst the bust of 1876 provided Britain with an excuse to place Egypt under a

‘temporary occupation’ that would last over seventy years.<sup>75</sup> This informal rule met immediate local resistance, with the revolution of 1881 giving rise to Wafd, Egypt’s first Nationalist Party, and the establishment of nominal independence in 1922 following the 1919 revolution.<sup>76</sup> With its strategic geographical position linking the various spheres of Britain’s global empire, Egypt was primarily administered to the maximum advantage of Britain’s financial interests.<sup>77</sup> Ensuing industrialisation fostered a growing working and middle class that anticipated both the constitutional and material advantages of modernisation.<sup>78</sup> In order to manage Egyptian nationalism and popular resistance against its imperial rule, British administrators became adept at manipulating political tensions between Egypt’s Palace and Parliament through a ‘veiled protectorate’ based at the High Commissioner’s residence. By the mid-1930s however such divide and rule tactics were becoming increasingly transparent to both the Egyptian population and the world at large, with Axis propaganda exploiting the illegality of Britain’s occupation of a country dangerously exposed to influence and interference from other international actors across the Mediterranean region and beyond.<sup>79</sup>

The 1920s and early 1930s also witnessed a heyday in Egyptian liberal arts, characterised by hybrid cultural elements that are most evident in the cinema and music of the era. In this cultural realm, interwar Cairo seemed to promise the kind of glamorous and liberal cosmopolitanism that was often associated with permissive hedonism in the Western imagination. On the geopolitical level, signs of waning Franco-British influence (especially concerning their apparent inability or unwillingness to

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<sup>75</sup> As the Egyptian economy served foreign interests primarily and national needs only peripherally, the series of short depressions that culminated in the 1929-1933 crash increased economic insecurity and social inequality. Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt’s Liberal Experiment* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), p. 247.

<sup>76</sup> Tarek Osman, *Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to the Muslim Brotherhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 33; Darwin, *The Empire Project*, p. 72.

<sup>77</sup> Enjoying many non-territorial privileges such as tax exemption, Egypt’s European community of around 100,000 were widely regarded as ‘a parasitical class’ by much of Egypt’s general population and were held responsible for many of the country’s misfortunes. Darwin, *The Empire Project*, p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, pp. 75-78.

<sup>79</sup> Osman, p. 33; Darwin, *The Empire Project*, p. 72.

protect Abyssinia and Libya from Italy's colonial ambitions), were characterised in the Egyptian public sphere as clear indicators that 'small nations' were living in perilous times. As it became understood that neither informal colonial powers, nor international bodies such as the League of Nations, could ultimately be relied upon for help or protection in an age of militant nationalist extremism, anti-imperial sentiment grew further. Such an international climate escalated calls for meaningful independence and helped foster a pan-Arabic shift away from the dangerous intrigue and influence of Europe's internal and imperial geopolitics, a precursor to many decolonising nations' later attempts to disentangle themselves from Cold War antagonisms.<sup>80</sup>

The late-1930s notion that Egypt merely provided an exotic backdrop for greater European rivalry can be seen in some of the actor's accounts. Anthony Quayle noted the grim irony of play-acting *Henry V* as some feeble countermeasure to a rising tide of Fascist militarism.<sup>81</sup> After one show he discovered Hans Beckhoff, a Nazi enthusiast he had previously met in London, waiting for him in the stage wings:

He was the head [...] of the German *Reisebüro* in Cairo. And of what else I wondered? I would have taken a bet that he knew the strength and weakness of every British Army Unit stationed in Egypt. He had *Abwehr* stamped all over him [...] His smile was condescending — with good reason. Hitler was ascendant; Europe was his for the taking — perhaps more [...] though the formal hostilities might be delayed and delayed again there stood between us a mutual, unmistakable declaration of war. We shook hands coolly and he left.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Gershoni and Jankowski, pp. 59-63. In 1935 all Egyptian political parties formed a united front to demand restoration of the 1923 parliamentary constitution as well as treaty negotiations with London. On 23 June Britain's conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin recognised that 'failure to conclude a treaty would add a disorganised Near East to the existing disturbed state of Europe'. The newly negotiated terms allowed Britain a twenty-year term on military rights to the Canal Zone, a military retreat to 'training grounds' (actually within only a few miles of Cairo itself), and a guarantee that Egyptian would aid Britain if war broke out. Darwin, *The Empire Project*, pp. 472-73.

<sup>81</sup> Although Olivier's 1944 film adaptation became the most famous instance, the play's long association with English martial victory has frequently seen it called upon in service to national mobilisation. James N. Loehlin, *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry V* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1-24.

<sup>82</sup> Quayle, pp. 195-96.

Quayle's dramatic account is coloured by the popular British notion that Nazism had infiltrated Egyptian society itself, a view subsequently dismissed by many historians.<sup>83</sup> In truth the initial idea for the Egyptian leg of the Old Vic tour was not directly concerned with countering Fascism, but came following the realisation that despite its material strengths Britain had failed to foster any kind of positive attitudes towards its imperial stewardship in a key, though increasingly restive, part of its global Empire. Compared to the colonial practices of competing European nations such as France, Britain's imperial rule had only provided adequate schooling for its own administrators and selected pro-British local elites. Over time it had been neglectful towards the growing demands of Egypt's aspiring middle classes, and paltry in terms of British arts and cultural provision across Egypt in general. Britain's historical preference of letting successful trade and a strong military presence speak for itself had long been exposed as a dated and neglectful form of colonial rule, and had since become wholly inadequate for countering the ways in which mid twentieth century anti-colonial struggles were being shaped by US and Soviet thinking. To make matters worse, the resource plunder characteristic of colonial-industrial modernisation inevitably fostered growing economic divisions within Egypt itself. Such extreme income disparities and unjust social stratification helped fuel mass political unrest, with the frustrated Egyptian middle classes swelling the ranks of protesters agitating for the complete evacuation of the British.

Such shortcomings in cultural and educational provision had been flagged up frequently in the years following the First World War. Lord Allenby first requested permission to inaugurate British cultural programmes in order to assuage the demands of the independence uprising of 1919. The treasury's stranglehold on cultural diplomacy's funding meant that he was optimistically informed that 'we shall have to rely on

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<sup>83</sup> See Gershoni and Jankowski for example.

successful administration for propaganda in Egypt'.<sup>84</sup> On becoming High Commissioner of Egypt in 1933, Sir Percy Loraine bluntly stated that:

The failure of England to make use of the forty years from 1882 to 1922 to create for herself a strong cultural position in Egypt is one of the most extraordinary phenomena of our illogical imperial story.<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, Russell Galt of the American University in Cairo concluded his comparative study of various European colonial educational policies across North Africa, by declaring that:

In Egypt England had an Army, — the French an idea. England had educational control — France, a clear educational philosophy [...] the French pen has proved mightier than the English sword.<sup>86</sup>

In contrast to the failings of Britain's laissez-faire approach, to some France's policy of direct colonial rule seemed to provide a model for ways in which cultural provision could be effective in curtailing anti-colonial dissent at the time.<sup>87</sup> Sir Charles Mendl, Press Attaché at the British Embassy in Paris for example, argued that the Alliance Française had become 'by far the largest, best organised and most powerful instrument of cultural propaganda that France possessed'.<sup>88</sup>

At the very beginning of its establishment, and following the example of this French lead, the British Council set up a 'Near East Committee' chaired by Lord Lloyd before his eventual promotion to Chairman. The committee felt that new British Institutes could use culture to protect and promote Britain's imperial jurisdiction. By meeting the progressive nationalists' desire for access to western educational standards and technical assistance, it was hoped that cultural measures could be taken to placate the

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<sup>84</sup> In Donaldson, p. 79.

<sup>85</sup> In Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, p. 169.

<sup>86</sup> In Donaldson, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion of this controversial claim in the context of the French Empire during the interwar years see, Adria K. Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-Colonial Protest in the French Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 143-48.

<sup>88</sup> In Donaldson, p. 3.



long list of Egyptian grievances. In theory Britain had an opportunity to secure even deeper influence for itself in the future if it could be seen as a known and trusted partner, offering 'tactful' and 'disinterested' aid and advice to Egypt as it set out to realise its goals of modernization.<sup>89</sup>

An additional complication to the task facing the Near East Committee was the stiff international competition that Britain faced within its own sphere of influence. In reality even expatriate British communities had long become reliant on French and Italian institutions for decent schooling. As an illustration of the problem, when British Council Institutes opened in Cairo and Alexandria in 1938, 30,000 Maltese and Cypriot children and 7000 British children were in immediate need of unavailable school places.<sup>90</sup> In the broader terms of colonial administration, Lloyd calculated that if provisions were quickly provided for the education of so many British subjects living in the Near East, imperial benefits would naturally ensue:

The establishment of a sound educational system for British subjects in that area should provide a solid foundation [for] the spread of British Culture amongst the non-British peoples.<sup>91</sup>

Although Lloyd was intolerant to the notion of self-determination in India, he evidently understood the influence that Western schooling could have on colonial subjects, a Victorian notion summarised in Edward Thornton's dictum that 'as soon as [Indians] become first-rate European scholars, they must cease to be Hindoos'.<sup>92</sup> Repeating such nineteenth-century formulas, Britain continued to hope that the education of elite imperial subjects across the Middle East would also ensure its position in the mid twentieth century. Although such an antiquated strategy would be woefully inadequate to

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<sup>89</sup> Forbes Adam, p. 282.

<sup>90</sup> Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>91</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 72 British Council: Sub-Committee on British Education in the Near East: Minutes 1935-1939, 20 November 1935.

<sup>92</sup> In Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 23.

counteract the pressures of the time, between 1937 and Britain's complete evacuation in 1956, it was hoped that cultural provision would help reinvigorate colonial education and offset the challenges of festering anti-imperial resentment.

### **The Old Vic Company's *Hamlet* in Egypt (1939)**

Competition between British, French, and Italian schooling was also reflected in the public theatre. Consequently it was hoped that the Old Vic tour would raise the general profile of British cultural achievements in Egypt, and provide an important cultural adjunct to its expanding provision for access to British colonial education.<sup>93</sup> Although Guthrie's production of *Hamlet* brought an English interpretation that emphasised psychological complexity in its characterisations (following a German tradition), staged within recognisably European drawing room settings (following the Russian and Scandinavian influences of Naturalism), in truth it was just one of a range of interpretations available to audiences within Egypt's lively performance tradition during the era's liberal experiment. As with education, the dominant European influences on Egypt's local scene was not British at all, but primarily French and Italian.

Ever since Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* (1871) was commissioned to inaugurate Khedive Ismail's Italian-style Cairo Opera House, opera had publicly represented the 'modernising drives of Egypt's rulers' with Italian and French styles of acting influencing Egypt's star performers such as Shaykh Salama Higazi.<sup>94</sup> Shakespeare had long been absorbed into this Egyptian love for the operatic form. Keeping with the example of *Hamlet*, Higazi commissioned the first translation in 1901 which he then performed in

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<sup>93</sup> Lloyd was informed as early as October 1937 that the Egyptian Embassy was requesting a British theatrical company, and that 'although the terms of the Old Vic Company may be too high for the Egyptians [...] it is desirable that the proposal [...] should not break down simply on these grounds'. TNA: BW 72, 6 October 1937, 9 December 1937.

<sup>94</sup> Margaret Litvin, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 61; M. M. Badawi, 'Shakespeare and the Arabs', in *Cairo Studies of English* (Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Anjlu al-Misriyya, 1966), pp. 181-96.

Cairo's Egyptian Theatre and later again at his Arabic Theatre Company in 1905.<sup>95</sup>

'Abdu's translation featured so many wild departures from the Shakespearean text that his *Hamlet* is considered an 'icon of infidelity' among translation critics.<sup>96</sup> Irrespective of the fact that 'Abdu went so far as giving the play a happy ending, it was produced at least seventeen times between 1901 and 1910, second only to Najib al-Haddad's *Martyrs of Love* (1895) which was also a Shakespeare-inspired musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Alongside the demand to satisfy local tastes, extreme adaptations of Shakespearean texts are also understandable when we remember that most literary translation in Egypt worked from French, not English. As an example of the considerable cultural ground Britain hoped to recover from its European competitors, while there were no more than fifteen English writers translated into Arabic by 1930 there were one hundred and fifty French ones.<sup>97</sup> In such Arabic adaptations Salama Higazi, George Abyad, and the Italian-trained Youssef Wahbi amongst many others, staged *Hamlet* between 1900 and 1930. Female performers also followed Sarah Bernhardt's footsteps in playing the title role in Cairo in 1908, while Fatima Rushdi's later portrayal in 1929-1930 generated enormous international press interest with cosmopolitan magazines reporting on how she practiced fencing daily in the Ezbekiya Gardens. This was succeeded by Amina Rizq's *Hamlet* in 1936 indicating that by 1939, for the growing professional and middle classes who could afford to attend such performances, Shakespeare was considered a global resource that they had long staked an Egyptian claim upon and appropriated into a powerful local idiom.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> As 'Abdu's translations were from the French, French Shakespeare entered Egyptian theatre 'through the breach that opera had made'. Litvin, pp. 59-60; John Pemble, *Shakespeare Goes to Paris: How the Bard Conquered France* (London: Hambledon Press, 2005), p. 95.

<sup>96</sup> In Litvin, p. 64.

<sup>97</sup> Litvin, pp. 62-64, p. 71.

<sup>98</sup> This sense of a universal Shakespeare provided some political traction for Egyptian nationalists. Marking the three-hundred-year anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 1916, Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed contributed to

Merula Guinness's diary suggests that the Old Vic tourists were entirely ignorant of such a rich local context however, as the company members were cloistered into a narrow world of privileged British expatriates and Embassy parties. The sense that Egyptian voices were marginalised in such settings is palpable:

The Egyptian guests were very shy and difficult to speak to. Casson was doing the missionary and kept interrupting a quite interesting old man who did know something about the country, to try to expound his fantastic muddled theories of the world brotherhood.<sup>99</sup>

By the late 1930s, Europe's gilded international quarters stood in ever deepening contrast to the lives lived by the majority of Egyptians surrounding them. The realisation of the extent to which most locals' rights were closely circumscribed had a strong impact on the British visitors.<sup>100</sup> After continental Europe, the Old Vic performers found the proximity of Egypt's grotesque economic inequalities unsettling. The pockets of prosperous content they glided between seemed to be merely 'decorative social features' that failed to conceal the grinding poverty experienced by the majority. An expatriate couple, the Lows:

drove us to their house along mud roads with mud hovels on each side and thick with children and donkeys, sheep, goats [...] we just drove straight through them – none were killed. Their house and garden are like a piece of England plonked down in the middle of a country completely different, one felt one was on an island and though it was very nice it was depressing. The tea got through all right – not particularly gay, but not many moments of great strain. We were driven back through the strange creatures again.<sup>101</sup>

Merula ultimately concluded that the company felt more alienated from the British elites they met in Egypt than they did from their hosts in Italy. Her diary records the strong

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the global coverage by stating that 'the English poet does not limit his story to a specific people or to a particular instance of the human condition, but treats human beings, whatever their nation'. In Litvin, p. 73-74.

<sup>99</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 2., 21 February 1939.

<sup>100</sup> Osman, p. 27; Darwin, *The Empire Project*, p. 71.

<sup>101</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 2., 4 February 1939.

impression of how colonial living had a dissipating effect on the British community living there, and that they had cultivated a guarded defensiveness towards all outside visitors. They were ‘all kind and polite, but only showed a very carefully polished outside’.<sup>102</sup>

A large part of the tension between the company and Egypt’s British expatriate community was centred around issues of class and wealth. The stark economic disparities of Egypt served as a reminder of economic inequalities back home in 1930s Britain. Although the Old Vic’s cultural capital could not have been higher, it was equally famous for its earnest social policy, threadbare conditions, and somewhat worthy air of genteel impoverishment.<sup>103</sup> The Arnoldian notion that a national repertory theatre performing the classics was essential for that nation’s soul probably had little impression on Cairo’s cosmopolitan cocktail crowd. Despite this, the company’s rising cultural capital and nominal role as English National Theatre required them to rub shoulders with the wealthiest of elites, and attempt to garner financial support for the deserving old theatre back home in South-East London.

The deliberate fusion of diplomacy and celebrity glamour would become a defining feature of British Council tours over the coming decades. Guinness was frequently on display at a string of diplomatic social events, as well as taking lunch with the British Ambassador and the Egyptian Prime Minister. In practical terms this meant the couple blowing their small Old Vic salaries on the necessary attire to feel they were able to:

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<sup>102</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 2., 4 February 1939.

<sup>103</sup> Peter Roberts, *The Old Vic Story: A Nation’s Theatre 1818-1976* (London: W. H. Allen, 1976). The Old Vic’s ability to associate Shakespeare with education and a modicum of state support strengthened the sense that it was a ‘worthy cause’ to disseminate down to ‘the masses’ despite its commercial struggles. J.C. Trewin, *Shakespeare on the English Stage 1900-1964* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964), p. 189. The Old Vic had a history of attempting to bridge Britain’s class-cultural divides by staging Shakespeare well and affordably for some of South-East London’s poorer audiences. Adding to the view that Shakespeare could be a force for civic health, the 1916 Finance Duties Act allowed ‘educational’ theatre productions to be exempted from Entertainments Tax. The Old Vic only made full use of the Act from 1934 onwards however. Charles Landstone, *Off-Stage* (London: Elek Books, 1953), pp. 69-70.

face the snobs at the Ambassador's garden party with a brazen front. Alec wore his new shirt [...] the party was deathly [...] were introduced to some young ladies who were so well bred that their fingers melted in one's hand, one of them was too grand to speak at all [...] Left as soon as possible and fell into another big hate.<sup>104</sup>

At smaller gatherings 'Alec did his stuff' attempting to raise funds and 'talked about the poverty of the Vic very eloquently', though in Merula's eyes 'the place was seething with money and they all looked awful'.<sup>105</sup> Following one such fund-raising event Chester Beatty (a multi-millionaire who only read Edgar Wallace novels despite owning a valuable collection of rare Arabic manuscripts) donated a paperback edition of *Twelfth Night* to Alec, a casual gesture that struck Merula Guinness as cruel and unthinking.<sup>106</sup>

Despite the political differences in Italy, the company felt there had been a genuine cultural entente with their hosts there. If Portugal and Italy had raised any belief in cultural diplomacy's ability to forge closer ties or influence decision-making elites however, Egypt dispelled them completely. Cosmopolitan audiences in Cairo underlined how gilded British elites regarded Shakespeare as little more than a worthy cause; tolerated for its class-cultural associations and valued mostly for its symbolic cultural prestige. To make matters worse, the closeted lives of such cosmopolitan groups offered a grotesque colonial analogy to the entrenched class and wealth disparities that awaited the actors upon their return to England. The tour came to an end in Malta in the spring of 1939, and for many in the company it seemed to provide some resolution and a palpable sense of relief. Here their audience was mostly made up of Royal Navy personnel, and both Merula and Alec Guinness appeared to fall for them in a big way:

They all have lovely honest faces and kind twinkly eyes [...] they are real people and adore their work and are generous and frank

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<sup>104</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 2., 27 February 1939.

<sup>105</sup> BL: MS 89015/1/4/1, vol. 2., 4 February 1939.

<sup>106</sup> In Read, p. 80, pp. 87-88.

about one another – so different from the Cairo Cocktail crowd.<sup>107</sup>

Overall we can say that, although Britain's on-going association of 'high' culture with class privilege probably gave shape and direction to its decision to use Shakespeare from the outset, it came up against alternative, and equally effective, nationalist-populist claims on the continent. Fascism's eager appropriation of Shakespeare into its ideology and policies of mass mobilisation provided a robust challenge to any residual and worn-down Arnoldian notions that Shakespeare possessed innately civilising values for the shattered social and economic landscape of late 1930s Britain. For the Old Vic actors, Shakespeare may have been a unique passion and concern; a cause in-and-of-itself that seemed worthy of sharing and celebrating overseas. For the tour's organisers however, Shakespeare merely provided validating cover for the advancement of pro-imperial and even pro-Fascist diplomatic policies. The fact that Egypt's own Shakespearian culture was of total unimportance to British cultural administrators reveals a highly instrumental and national-chauvinist approach that would carry through to the Cold War era. Such hubris was an indication of the difficulties that Britain would face in attempting to use soft power to forge enhanced relations there in future, especially as Anglo-Egypt's failed liberal experiment of the interwar years was about to come to a shuddering halt in the 1940s.

On the ground, the evidence suggests that exposure to a variety of political, administrative, diplomatic, and social elites, left many Old Vic actors feeling conflicted. Despite their mission's attempt at improving international understanding, its elitist focus seemed ultimately to confer cultural kudos upon the very people most responsible for the war's approach in the first place. This late-bohemian generation of English actors saw Shakespeare directly entwined in political and imperial practices, and consequently

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<sup>107</sup> In Read, pp. 89-90.

saw the common notion that art existed on some separate or elevated plane undermined at first-hand. As their ready identification with military audiences in Malta indicates, in turning away from the last vestiges of interwar privilege, they would ultimately come to be identified with the ‘warm glow’ and ‘wholesome militarism’ of the Second World War.<sup>108</sup> The fight for democracy at home and abroad would transform Britain’s theatrical landscape as well, whilst the tangible loss of imperial power and possessions would provide new impetus to the growing practice of Shakespearean cultural diplomacy.

### **The Cairo and Alexandria Drama Festivals (1944-1946)**

It is impossible to appreciate the important role that Shakespeare played in cultural diplomacy during the Cold War without first registering the evolution of its earliest deployments just prior to the Second World War. So far we have seen how Shakespearean cultural projections emerged from an interwar context of deep imperial anxiety alongside anti-Fascist and anti-Communist concern and competition. We can now turn to the uses that Shakespeare was put to immediately following the Second World War and at the dawn of the formal Cold War era itself.

State sponsorship of the arts, including theatre, began in Britain as a direct consequence of the Second World War.<sup>109</sup> The demoralising effects of Britain’s cultural blackout in its early stages, then dubbed the ‘phony’ or ‘bore’ war, led to the formation of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) with its stated aim of providing ‘the best’ entertainment ‘for the most’ people possible.<sup>110</sup> Although the concept of culture was still narrow, high-brow, and ‘improving’, its diffusion was aimed at being as broad as possible and sought to bring ‘the arts, hitherto unattainable for the

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<sup>108</sup> Paul Gilroy, *After Empire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), p. 95.

<sup>109</sup> Jorn Weingartner, *The Arts as a Weapon of War: Britain and the Shaping of National Morale in the Second World War* (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 2006), pp. 1-34.

<sup>110</sup> Andy Merriman, *Greasepaint and Cordite: How ENSA Entertained the Troops During World War II* (London: Aurum Press, 2014), p. 59.



lower strata of British society, to the people'.<sup>111</sup> As West End theatres sent their productions on lengthy excursions to escape the worst of the blitz, a new era of domestic theatre touring ensued. As a result London's more prestigious commercial theatres helped reinvigorate the remaining regional theatres that had managed to survive the commercial challenges of the interwar years. The Old Vic became one of the first professional theatre companies to join CEMA and relocated to Burnley where it made much of its wartime role of bringing the highest standards of classical repertory theatre to the mining and industrial regions of Wales and Lancashire.

A correlation between the experience gained through international touring, and the changes being made to domestic theatre can be traced here. Overseas propaganda strategies were being redeployed to the UK's internal margins as British attitudes themselves were still divided over the justness and causes for war.<sup>112</sup> CEMA provided war work for many of the personnel who advised and undertook tours with the British Council both before and after the conflict.<sup>113</sup> Despite its stated aims, CEMA's funding quickly and disproportionately allocated support for displaced 'high' cultural providers from London, often to the neglect of smaller regional clubs and organisations that arguably provided more popular cultural pursuits.<sup>114</sup> CEMA would eventually evolve into the Arts Council following the Second World War, and although the British cultural landscape that would emerge was fundamentally improved on that of the 1930s, arts

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<sup>111</sup> Weingertner, p. 164.

<sup>112</sup> Wartime examples of this were the Old Vic Company's tour of *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) and *Twelfth Night* around the well-equipped Victorian-era theatres in the industrial towns of Lancashire, and a tour of *Macbeth* to the mining villages of South Wales. Olivier wrote that 'Pioneering work was done by Sybil Thorndike, who returned to the fold (her second war at the Old Vic), and made extensive tours of the mining villages of North Wales, continuing Lilian's work of showing 'the best' to people who had never seen it before'. Laurence Olivier, 'From Gin Palace to National Theatre', in *Five Seasons of the Old Vic Theatre Company: A Scrapbook Record of Production for 1944-49* (London: Saturn Press, 1949), p. 5.

<sup>113</sup> Lewis Casson for example, asked Guthrie to place his Welsh *Macbeth* tour under the Old Vic banner and retired as CEMA's first Drama Director in order to lead the company on the road himself. Following it, he rotated back into the position of CEMA Drama Director before returning to the British Council's DAC after the war. Landstone, p. 21.

<sup>114</sup> With the relocation of civil servants, thousands of evacuees, and an influx of 60,000 off-duty British and American servicemen, Blackpool became the national centre for show business by the end of 1940. Merriman, p. 59.

funding would disproportionately support repertory companies performing the classics over a potential range of working-class cultural pursuits that have been much less documented.<sup>115</sup> The changes that took place were perhaps best summarised by Tyrone Guthrie, who saw the arrival of CEMA as a much-needed state cultural intervention, finally materialising now ‘Old Britannia suddenly realised that she would need more than a trident and a shield to keep her reputation’.<sup>116</sup> Guthrie understood that the conditions of total war could in fact save Britain’s threadbare classical repertory theatres by transforming them into an indispensable engine for both cultural change at home and national diplomacy overseas:

for the first time since the Tudors, the British Treasury has made manifest a belief that Art in general, and the art of theatre in particular, is not merely a graceful amenity but a necessity to a great nation which considers itself, and wishes to be considered, civilised.<sup>117</sup>

In Egypt the pre-war collaboration between the local Government and the British Council was resumed under the aegis of the Entertainment National Services Association (ENSA) in early 1944. Under the directorship of Basil Dean, ENSA tours provided entertainment to around 500,000,000 people living or serving overseas throughout the war, with an estimated four out of five members of Britain’s entertainment industry working for the organisation at some stage in their careers.<sup>118</sup> The global mobilisation of Britain’s theatre industry during the war meant that Dean was able to organised three annual Drama Festivals in transit cities like Cairo and Alexandria immediately following the war. The first in 1944 starred Emlyn Williams in *Blithe Spirit* (1941), *Night Must Fall* (1935), and *Flare Path* (1941); the second, with the Donald Wolfit

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<sup>115</sup> See Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the Fifty Years of the Arts Council in Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995); Richard Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council* (London: Werner Books, 1998).

<sup>116</sup> In Weingartner, pp. 162-63.

<sup>117</sup> James Forsyth, *Tyrone Guthrie* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 181.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh: Entertaining the British and American Armed Forces, 1939-1946* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s, 1978).

Company in 1945, staged *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Volpone* (1605), and *Much Ado About Nothing*; and the third headlined with The John Gielgud Company's *Hamlet* and *Blithe Spirit* in 1946.<sup>119</sup> Once again the initial idea for the festival originated with Bridge-Adams, the British Council's dramatic advisor who was also on ENSA's Advisory International Council. On the Egyptian side it was made possible by the support of the Cairo Royal Opera House's director Soliman Bey Naguib.<sup>120</sup>

Cold War cultural diplomacy took further shape with the establishment of the Cultural Relations Department (CRD) in 1943. Its creation explains how the British Council came to be working in concert with ENSA during the Cairo Drama Festivals. The CRD replaced the small Foreign Office information department that had supported British Council work up to that point and began managing the 'political and policy aspects' of the burgeoning field of post-war international cultural relations. Its purpose was to lend the British Council more 'political direction' in order to face the challenges of the era, especially the new global influence that the Soviet Union was set to enjoy following the Second World War.<sup>121</sup> As the global conflict began to reach its conclusion, Britain's Information Services quickly recognised the potential uses of cultural diplomacy in the post-war era, and the Cairo Drama Festivals provides early evidence of the new kinds of politicised cultural strategies that evolved to address challenges within contested colonial spaces.

The enormous changes taking place in Britain's domestic cultural landscape needed to be advertised in its overseas image. Most noticeably, rather than the pre-war practice of exclusively packaging Shakespeare as high culture targeting foreign decision-making elites, the festival organisers hoped to provide a more democratic and inclusive

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<sup>119</sup> Basil Dean, *Theatre at War* (London: Harrap & Co, 1956), pp. 500-02.

<sup>120</sup> Wolfit described Neguib as 'a great Anglophile' who was more enthusiastic than the 'embarrassed ENSA officials' who were 'dubious of the reception Shakespeare would receive'. Donald Wolfit, *First Internal* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1954), p. 229.

<sup>121</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, 'Putting Culture into the Cold War: The Cultural Research Department and British Covert Information Warfare', *Intelligence and National Security*, 18.2 (2003), 109-33 (p. 109).

image that could merge the incommensurate notions of Britain as both democracy and imperial power.<sup>122</sup> The intended vision was to have serving Commonwealth troops and officers, allied diplomatic personnel (including American and Soviet representatives), and pro-British Egyptian elites, sat side-by-side in mutual appreciation of Shakespeare.

Mindful that many serving soldiers would soon be voting citizens with expectations of meaningful social change and improvement upon demobilisation, British forces would be given access to a programme of classical entertainment in much-welcomed contrast to the end-of-the-pier variety acts that ENSA usually had on offer. Commensurate with this shift in diplomatic emphasis, Lloyd's pre-war hope of strengthening Britain's hand in Egypt by remodelling its colonial educational system was still in place despite the interruption of war. As a result, discounted student matinees for elite international schools would be available in the afternoons, prior to mixed audience performances for both public and military theatregoers in the evenings.

Ambitiously then, organisers hoped that the Cairo Drama Festivals could soothe Britain's class-cultural antagonisms, bolster its colonial education policy, and bring Egyptian audiences more closely into the orbit of the global community of the British Commonwealth (and away from other foreign influences) following the traumas of war. But what kind of theatrical manifestation could possibly be called upon to carry the weight of such aspirations? This late-war provision of the English national poet for all took two divergent forms. In 1946 it was The John Gielgud Company, a slice of authentic West End establishment culture charitably disseminated down to the masses. In 1945, it was the Donald Wolfit Company; an actor-manager led troupe that had more than a whiff of late-nineteenth century stage practice in its approach to the classics,

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<sup>122</sup> On the prevalence of such internal contradictions, see Graham MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 6-9, pp. 15-18.

helpfully evoking a bygone era when Shakespeare-in-performance actually was popular amongst some working-class audiences.

### **The Donald Wolfit Company in Egypt (1945)**

On 31 December 1944, the Donald Wolfit Company became one of the first theatrical companies to play France and Belgium in the wake of the German retreat. Egypt was an extension of that initial success. After attending Wolfit's *Hamlet* in Brussels, General Montgomery climbed on stage to exclaim to the assembled military audience that 'we are old friends. I have seen [Wolfit] so often at Stratford-upon-Avon. This is what I said the men have wanted for a long time'.<sup>123</sup> Although one of the proudest moments in Wolfit's life, Montgomery's statement can be read as pure politics following the realisation that now the war was ending, it was deemed unwise to condescend to the troops.<sup>124</sup>

Wolfit was invited to the front after playing a vanguard role in reinvigorating popular appreciation for Shakespeare during the war, and did much to associate it with Britain's dogged endurance during some of its darkest periods. Despite the appearance of personal sacrifice in service to public morale, there was a great deal of commercial self-interest behind Wolfit's actions as well. The cultural evacuation of London by West End theatres enabled the actor-manager to achieve a kind of reverse invasion, and take his company of latter-day strolling players into the vacated heart of the capital itself. There his defiant performances of *King Lear* during the blitz became the stuff of legend, later celebrated in fictional accounts such as Ronald Harwood's stage play *The Dresser* (1980).<sup>125</sup> Wolfit's old-fashioned, turn-of-the-century style chimed with the national desire to reassert some fortifying myths. His performances evoked the grand rhetorical

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<sup>123</sup> Ronald Harwood, *Sir Donald Wolfit: His Life and Work in the Unfashionable Theatre* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971), p. 188.

<sup>124</sup> On the politics surrounding demobilisation see, Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992), pp. 570-71; David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 97.

<sup>125</sup> Ronald Harwood, *The Dresser* (London: Amber Lane Press, 1984).

delivery of a bygone populist era, something that seemed to appeal greatly to the beleaguered democratic spirit of the time. By the end of the Second World War, Wolfit's apostolic belief in working-class Shakespeare played a key part in dispelling the War Office's reticence in providing Shakespeare for the troops.<sup>126</sup>

Dean described Wolfit as 'the star' of Egypt's Second Drama Festival in 1945, with 'his gusto and downright way with Shakespeare' being 'immensely popular, both in the camps at home and overseas'.<sup>127</sup> An apposite illustration of Wolfit's evangelism and popular appeal can be found in anecdotes of his journey from Liverpool to the Mediterranean aboard the *HMS Durban Castle*, part of a troop convoy heading out to the Pacific and Indian theatres of war. Wolfit persuaded the ship's Captain to allow his company to give an impromptu performance of *The Merchant of Venice* to an:

audience of eighteen hundred men squatted close-packed on the deck in their shirt sleeves [...] they cheered when Bassanio chose the right casket: they cheered again at the elopement and at the confusion of Shylock in the trial scene [...] I asked the audience how many of them had ever seen a play before. About one hundred hands went up. To my further question as to how many had seen a play by Shakespeare fewer than twenty hands showed. Thus did we treasure our literary and dramatic heritage in the year of grace nineteen-hundred-and-forty-five!<sup>128</sup>

Catching much of the hopeful democratic spirit of the age, the actors were cheered and waved off the ship at Port Said by over a thousand men while the ship's band played 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow'.<sup>129</sup> On his first morning in Cairo, Wolfit found further confirmation in the soundness of his Shakespearean campaign when he witnessed:

a long line of khaki commencing at the box office and stretching right across the front of the theatre [...] by eleven o'clock the theatre was sold out for the first week [...] in

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<sup>126</sup> See Harwood, *Donald Wolfit*; Laurence Raw, 'People's Theatre and Shakespeare in Wartime: Donald Wolfit's *King Lear* in London and Leeds, 1944-45', *Shakespeare*, 12.1 (2016), 55-66; Laurence Raw, *Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfit's Shakespeare Productions 1937-1953* (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2016).

<sup>127</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, pp. 501-02.

<sup>128</sup> Wolfit, p. 227.

<sup>129</sup> Wolfit, pp. 227-28.

successive weeks each member was booking hundreds of seats for his unit.<sup>130</sup>

Like others who enjoyed success during the ‘Shakespeare Boom’ of the immediate post-war period, Wolfit’s career greatly benefitted from playing to captive and entertainment-starved audiences. Wolfit’s company was viewed by many military theatregoers as a welcome relief from the plodding jingoism that so often characterised ENSA productions:

The opportunity of seeing the Wolfit Company was like a visit to a forgotten world of sanity, and I felt at the time that by his efforts he had given an amount of pleasure to his audiences that is rarely within the power of a performer to offer.<sup>131</sup>

Such favourable working-class reactions to Shakespeare performances were interpreted by the liberal administrators running and advising ENSA, CEMA, and British Council programmes, as proof that their cultural drive was creating the audiences of the future. They lent substance to their perennial dream of establishing an English National Theatre along similar lines to European rivals.<sup>132</sup> Beyond the issue of guaranteed high attendance thanks to block bookings and the lack of competition, such optimism also overlooked a harsher truth. Wolfit’s popularity came about not because he was quenching a thirst for ‘high’ culture, but because the way he went about it was so gloriously anachronistic.

The difference in production quality is obvious if we compare Guinness’s delicate psychological approach to *Hamlet* within a naturalistically rendered modern setting, and Wolfit’s barnstorming performances in the turn-of-the-century manner of Beerbohm Tree or Frank Benson. With threadbare sets, costumes that had become ‘shabby’ from ‘constant touring’, and a ‘definitely poor’ supporting cast (it was often

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<sup>130</sup> Wolfit, p. 230.

<sup>131</sup> In Harwood, *Donald Wolfit*, p. 191.

<sup>132</sup> Dean himself wrote a short pamphlet proposing how post-war reconstruction provided the perfect opportunity for establishing an English National Theatre. See, Basil Dean, *The Theatre in Reconstruction* (Tonbridge: Private Press, 1945).

claimed that this was a deliberate strategy aimed at making the leading man look better by comparison), Wolfit's no-frills yet self-aggrandising approach to Shakespeare was infamous.<sup>133</sup> As one London critic put it, 'in the theatre of my mind's eye I see Donald Wolfit perpetually bestriding the stage in some two-pence coloured Victorian play-print'.<sup>134</sup> Just as his reputation would epitomise the 'blitz spirit' for future generations, Wolfit's productions radiated nostalgia at the very moment they first occurred. His success relied upon the wartime era's ability to temporarily undo and suspend an entire history of class-cultural antagonism that shadowed the inflated claims being made by Britain's cultural administrators at the time.

The depleted and residual role that staged-Shakespeare played in the longer history of working-class culture is key to understanding the ambivalent nature of Wolfit's success with troops during the war years.<sup>135</sup> Andrew Murphy's *Shakespeare for the People* (2010) establishes the nineteenth-century foundations of such an historical understanding.<sup>136</sup> Murphy asserts that Shakespeare had become intertwined with 'issues of class' by the mid-nineteenth century, becoming a 'literary patron saint for the Chartist movement' following broad resentment at the limitations of the 1832 Reform Act.<sup>137</sup> Jonathan Rose also contends that Victorian Bardolatry 'was driven largely by working-class demand' and that 'Shakespeare was a proletarian hero who spoke directly to working people'.<sup>138</sup> Although enthusiasm for Shakespeare translated into high theatre attendance by workers (some of whom read a radical message into the play-texts themselves), such audiences also had 'hopelessly conservative tastes in stagecraft' with

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<sup>133</sup> Harwood, *Donald Wolfit*, p. 177; Raw, 'People's Theatre', p. 56.

<sup>134</sup> Wolfit saw himself as the heir of a noble actor-manager tradition passing down from Burbage, to Beerbohm Tree, and Frank Benson, before it mostly died off during the First World War. Harwood *Donald Wolfit*, p. 152.

<sup>135</sup> For details of the notion of residual and emergent cultures, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 121-27.

<sup>136</sup> Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People: Working-Class Readers, 1800-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>137</sup> Murphy, p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, pp. 122-23.



‘even Victorian critics complain[ing] about the stodginess of plebian audiences’.<sup>139</sup>

Ultimately the autodidacticism that had typified working-class appreciation and appropriations of Shakespeare began, according to John Burnett, to give way to a more ‘passive acceptance’ as ‘schooling became compulsory’ after the 1870 Education Act.<sup>140</sup>

Harley Granville-Barker (an enormously influential exponent of the ideals exciting British theatre practitioners during the interwar and early post-war years) spearheaded the modernist movement’s counterclaim on Shakespeare in the early twentieth century, dismissing what remained of working-class Shakespearean theatrical culture as being merely populist.<sup>141</sup> As the original campaigning figurehead for an English National Theatre, Granville-Barker provides an intriguing historical link between elitist and modernist appropriations of Shakespeare, and some of the earliest institutions employing Shakespeare as a tool for British cultural diplomacy. Granville-Barker ran the first, though initially independent, British Institute in Paris as well as advising Lloyd during a number of visits in the establishment of new ones in Lisbon in the late 1930s.<sup>142</sup> Murphy argues that such modernist founders not only instigated ‘a reactionary denial of the possibility that the working class could ever produce a figure of Shakespeare’s magnitude’ but also evolved such antagonism into an even greater claim that ‘what the working class could not produce they were also unlikely to be able to properly understand’.<sup>143</sup>

From the beginnings of the twentieth century Shakespeare was annexed onto the side of Drama (as a professionalised extension of the academy) rather than the Theatre (with its immediate commercial pressures), though this gap began to be bridged once the

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<sup>139</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, p. 124.

<sup>140</sup> In Murphy, p. 165.

<sup>141</sup> Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (New York, NY: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), pp. 234-36, pp. 270-74. Dennis Kennedy, *Granville Barker and the Dream of Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>142</sup> Croall, *Gielgud*, pp. 273-74.

<sup>143</sup> Murphy, p. 175.

interwar generation surrendered such antagonistic class positions in order to establish a classical repertory company, or nominal National Theatre.<sup>144</sup> As Tyrone Guthrie indicated, Shakespeare's national-symbolic value would facilitate access to much-needed government funding and support the growth of cultural diplomacy both at home and overseas, providing the means to salvage England's remaining classical repertory theatres such as the Old Vic.<sup>145</sup>

If the Shakespearian programme of the 1945 Cairo Drama Festival helped engender a positive sense of British class cohesion, did it achieve anything for Anglo-Egyptian relations? Wolfit was effective in the sense that he also enjoyed popularity within Royalist sections of the Egyptian ruling class, a key segment of Cairene society that traditionally constituted Britain's base of support and influence in the country. King Farouk attended the Command Performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* having also previously met Wolfit at Stratford-upon-Avon when he visited with his mother to see his 1937 performance in *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>146</sup> Although such cultural manifestations could still bring Commonwealth and Egyptian audiences briefly together under the same roof, it is difficult to imagine that traumatic wartime incidents were far from many Egyptian's minds. Especially in the aftermath of the King's near abdication in 1942 under direct military pressure from the British Ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson.<sup>147</sup>

Wolfit's own anecdotal account of the tour provides an inadvertent illustration of Farouk's continuing public humiliation, and the sense that a wider political theatre was framing the Festival itself. In commemoration of Shakespeare's Birthday on 23 April, Wolfit organised a 'Revel' following a performance of *Twelfth Night* that featured:

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<sup>144</sup> Raymond Williams stated that 'it is an historical fact that from the 1890s [...] the significant drama was always a minority breakaway from the majority commercial theatres'. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 194. See also, Raymond Williams, *Drama From Ibsen to Elliot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952).

<sup>145</sup> For a history of the regional repertory theatre movement see, George Rowell and Anthony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>146</sup> Wolfit, p. 231.

<sup>147</sup> Springhall, pp. 87-91.

An enormous cake, said to contain no fewer than two-hundred-and-fifty Egyptian eggs, and surmounted by a laurel wreath and the head of the Bard in sugar icing.

When the item was auctioned for the British War Relief Fund:

the bidding grew hectic, rapidly rose to one hundred pounds, and after some spirited exchanges, was eventually knocked down to a representative from the Abdin Palace who purchased it for King Farouk for one-hundred-and-seventy pounds!<sup>148</sup>

The event is full of awkward and ambiguous gestures. As a cultural icon the playwright is both symbolically elevated and materially debunked. The auction suggests that Shakespeare's role in the Cairo Drama Festival was to mediate the continued public humiliation of Egypt's Royal family by sanctifying their on-going payments to Britain's occupying forces for the war effort.<sup>149</sup> In the extent to which they were popular, Wolfit's Cairo Opera House performances marked a post-war hiatus in imperial affairs. British troops could enjoy the unique experience of being given brief access to a once popular performance tradition that had long since been surrendered. Egypt's Royalists could find it acceptable cover for the ignominy of bankrolling a foreign colonising power under the watchful eyes of other Allied Pact diplomats and dignitaries. Despite such carefully stage-managed festivities, the veneer of British popularity and prestige would shortly be peeled away as nationalist aspirations resurfaced. By the time the Gielgud Company arrived in Egypt for the third and final Cairo Festival in February 1946, any surviving local interest would wither in the face of massive anti-British student protests. As early as 1946, Egypt's struggle for decolonisation would already be taking on formal Cold War characteristics, as both American and Soviet influence helped agitate against Britain's continued presence within its prized ex-protectorate.

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<sup>148</sup> Wolfit, p. 230.

<sup>149</sup> At the time Britain owed Egypt around £400,000,000 for 'services rendered' during the war. Darwin, *The Empire Project*, p. 525.

### The John Gielgud Company's *Hamlet* in Egypt (1946)

The immediate post-war years saw a 'Shakespeare Boom' in Britain with his plays enjoying a wider popularity than at any period since the Napoleonic era.<sup>150</sup> In competition with Wolfit's popular brand of Shakespeare, elite strands of the West End theatre world were also enlisted to disseminate high culture as broadly as possible during the war.<sup>151</sup> In offering up his services to both CEMA and ENSA, John Gielgud represented the acceptance of such cultural shifts at the very heights of the theatrical establishment. In 1944, against a London background of Wolfit's *King Lear*, the return of the Old Vic to the capital with Olivier's *Richard III*, and the release of Olivier's film version of *Henry V*, Gielgud had decided to reprise his fifth production of *Hamlet* at London's Haymarket Theatre prior to taking it on an ENSA sponsored tour to India and the Far East before concluding in Egypt. Dean remembered the tour as being one of ENSA's finest though least advertised enterprises.<sup>152</sup> In fact Gielgud had taken *Hamlet* to Elsinor, Denmark on a previous British Council visit in 1939 and was no stranger to cultural diplomacy, being 'treated like an ambassador' and lauded as 'almost a National Theatre in himself' at the time.<sup>153</sup> Perhaps due to such aggrandising experiences, Gielgud was perplexed by the challenge of playing garrison theatres overseas. He originally intended to tour the turn-of-the-century farce *Charlie's Aunt* (1892) but was persuaded to go with *Hamlet* instead as 'everyone assures me it is a mistake to play down to the

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<sup>150</sup> Croall, *Gielgud*, p. 315. Tennant Productions sought to exploit the advantages of the 1934 Entertainments Tax exemption when staging Shakespeare and other Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Restoration plays. Beyond the efforts of CEMA and ENSA, such commercial opportunism also accounts for much of the mid-to-late 1940s 'Shakespeare Boom'. Binkie Beaumont claimed to have 'had a good war' as Tennant Productions had presented fifty-five plays in the West End, and toured over a hundred to captive audiences during the conflict. Richard Huggett, *Binkie Beaumont: Eminence Grise of the West End Theatre 1933-1973* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 323; Landstone, pp. 69-70.

<sup>151</sup> Gielgud's West-End manager Binkie Beaumont announced that his star was to do his bit for the war effort by joining the Old Vic and pledging to 'play nothing but Shakespeare and the classics for the duration of the war'. Furthermore, the actor 'made a solemn vow to join ENSA and take their productions anywhere in the world where there were troops awaiting entertainment'. Huggett, p. 246.

<sup>152</sup> The full tour itinerary was: Karachi, Bombay from 20 October 1945, Deolali from 7 November, Ceylon from 5 December, Burma, Singapore from 22 December, Saigon between 25 and 28 December, Hong Kong from 2 January 1946, and finally Cairo from 8 February. Dean, *Theatre at War*, p. 498.

<sup>153</sup> Croall, *Gielgud*, p. 261.

troops'.<sup>154</sup> Eventually Gielgud compromised by also taking Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, but his diaries and letters register his continued surprise and bemusement at finding *Hamlet* the more popular of the two amongst military audiences.<sup>155</sup>

Egypt had undergone dramatic changes between the second and third Cairo Drama festivals of 1945 and 1946. Previously King Farouk and the British High Commissioner had spent the war years embroiled in political manoeuvres to either support or undermine a variety of elected national governments.<sup>156</sup> In the view of the majority of ordinary Egyptians, despite their country being nominally independent since 1922, The Wafd Party had repeatedly failed to dislodge the intransigent British. After the war it was clear that the coloniser's troops were intent on maintaining their occupation, as indeed they would until being expelled in 1956. In parallel, the King's near abdication in 1942 exposed the military and coercive nature of Britain's political power.<sup>157</sup> With the removal of the Axis threat to North Africa, the constitutional deadlock no longer contained broad anti-colonial feeling and Egypt's political landscape began to fracture internally. Heated debates as to what type of nation Egypt intended on becoming featured increasingly incommensurate notions. Meanwhile struggles between Salifists, Liberals, and Nationalists took on embryonic Cold War characteristics as they came increasingly under the influence of ideas imported from either Soviet Russia or the United States. Between 1945 and 1952 discontent with Egypt's failed interwar liberal experiment under British indirect rule took the form of labour strikes, student protests, anti-establishment press activities, and mass demonstrations. Such events were organised by groups as diverse as local branches of the Communist Party, the Muslim

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<sup>154</sup> Croall, *Gielgud*, p. 317. Fellow actor Nancy Nevison also commented on how the choice of Shakespeare surprised many at the time, 'before we left England, people said, "*Hamlet* for the troops, are you mad?"' Croall, *Gielgud*, p. 320.

<sup>155</sup> Richard Mangan, ed., *Gielgud's Letters* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004), pp. 82-86.

<sup>156</sup> Al-Sayyid-Marsot, p. 232.

<sup>157</sup> Springhall, pp. 87-91.

Brotherhood, and Young Egypt.<sup>158</sup> 1946 would signal the start of Egypt's final transition toward full independence during an era of political protests, state violence, the assassination of prominent Egyptian politicians (including two Prime Ministers), and the retreat of the British to the canal zone; setting the stage for their eventual expulsion.<sup>159</sup>

Despite such a volatile political situation, the British Ambassador had initially indicated that the timing of the third Drama Festival was 'most opportune' and Lord Hankey, the Minister of State, claimed he would give it 'every support'.<sup>160</sup> Inauspiciously the festival opened on 9 February, a key date in Egypt's student movement that saw thousands of secondary school and university students take to the streets with eighty-nine being injured as a consequence.<sup>161</sup> Neither the Royal Palace nor the British Embassy were willing to confirm their attendance under such tense political circumstances, and the resulting withdrawal of official support meant a lack of protection for the Drama Festival itself. ENSA's Public Relations Officer was forced to visit the Young Muslim Men's Association to ask them not to 'sabotage the Festival nor burn down the Opera House'.<sup>162</sup> Despite the political anxiety that threw its shadow over the Festival's opening, Gielgud attempted to drum up interest by announcing to the press that these would be his final appearances in the role of Prince Hamlet. Dean also gave an opening speech that was transmitted on Middle East Forces Broadcasting and later rebroadcast in Arabic translation on the Cairo-based Forces Broadcasting Service. In it he gave 'a complete circus of thanks' to everyone involved only to realise that he 'could see no Egyptian faces

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<sup>158</sup> Selman Botman, *Egypt From Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), p. 154.

<sup>159</sup> Al-Sayyid-Marsot, p. 229; Darwin, *The Empire Project*, p. 218; Osman, pp. 44-45. Due to the Anglo-Egyptian deadlock over the 1936 Treaty (which also failed to be resolved by the UN Security Council), the student uprising of 1946 eventually led to Egypt's unilateral abrogation of it. Many of the Free Officers who would eventually seize power in July 1952 came into political activism as high school students during the 1946 student uprising. Ahmed Abdalla, *The Student Movements and National Politics in Egypt, 1923-1973* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), pp. 62-79.

<sup>160</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, p. 503.

<sup>161</sup> Abdalla, p. 64.

<sup>162</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, p. 504.

in the upraised cocktail glasses'.<sup>163</sup> Although on the opening night 'members of the Egyptian Government were meant to be present alongside accredited representatives of the Allied Powers in Cairo' such as the Russian Minister to Egypt, the only Egyptian present was Ismael Sidky, the Minister of Finance who had come to see 'how his money was being spent'.<sup>164</sup> Of the thirty-nine scheduled performances, three would be cancelled due to anti-British student protests and, besides school matinee performances, local Egyptian attendance would start low and fall steadily.

On one of the first days of mass demonstrations, Dean arrived at the Opera House to find it locked. His account displays a single-minded determination to put on a show in the midst of major historical events, and is littered with the kind of brash over-confidence and casual racism that Britain's Empire fostered in its administrators. Apparently seeing 'no reason' why the mass movement 'should stop our rehearsals', the actors and manager were gathered on the theatre foyer's roof overlooking the Opera Square. Although the violent break-up of some protesting groups had led to an escalation in tensions, with shops bearing British signs being selected for 'special treatment', when the 'downpour of nationalism began' Dean thought nothing of standing in plain view with his entire cast dressed in regulation ENSA Army uniforms:

shouting crept nearer and nearer. Presently the tingling of falling glass mingled with it, and the banging of sticks against steel shutters [...] in the shimmering noon day heat the figures had a marionettish look, giving to the whole performance an air of unreality, like an extreme long shot in a film.<sup>165</sup>

That Dean saw the student nationalists as 'marionettish' is telling as nowhere in his otherwise detailed account does he mention their political demands, the recent resignation of the Prime Minister, or the nationwide insistence that the British evacuate Egypt. As the National Committee of Workers and Students put it, the 21 February was:

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<sup>163</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, p. 504; Croall, *Gielgud*, p. 325.

<sup>164</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, p. 504.

<sup>165</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, pp. 506-07.

A day that will make it clear to British imperialism and to the world that the Egyptian people has completed its preparation for active combat until the nightmare of imperialism that has crushed our hearts for sixty-four years has vanished [...] proof of the fact the Egyptian people is resolved not to give up, even for a moment, the evacuation of Egypt and the Sudan [...] let us reaffirm our unity without divisiveness — workers and artisans, students, merchants and officials, our whole people standing solidly together to tear off the infamous badge of humiliation and slavery.<sup>166</sup>

Despite the dramatic and descriptive quality to Dean's account, he entirely omits such perspectives, even implying that the students were merely puppets in some larger, though never articulated, political game. The 'unreality' with which he viewed the violence approaching 'like an extended long shot in a film' suggests an inability to accept that Egyptians could be revolting against British rule at all. The next morning Dean recalled his continuing frustration with cancellations and, when attempting to return to the theatre for rehearsals, discovering Soliman Naguib 'fearful for the safety of his Opera House, beg[ging] us in tears to go away'.<sup>167</sup>

Prior to the peak of the demonstrations, Sidky Pasha, the Minister of Finance who was the sole representative at the Festival's opening press junket, became Prime Minister.<sup>168</sup> Although the third Cairo Drama Festival did resume, it was without official governmental support or Royal consent. Dean's growing frustration was evident when he compared the relative success of exclusive school matinees with the larger political turmoil gripping the country:

We were still without open support from the palace, although the Queen Mother and one of her daughters attended a student's matinee of *Hamlet* incognito. A strange sight that was: the rows of nodding tar-brushes following the play from printed texts held before them like prayer missals, accompanying the

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<sup>166</sup> In Abdalla, p. 66.

<sup>167</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, p. 508.

<sup>168</sup> Following the resignation of Prime Minister Mahmoud Fahmy El-Nokrachy on 15 February, Ismail Sidky, a founding member of The Wafd Party, quelled demonstrations by demanding the withdrawal of the British military to the Canal Zone whilst also employing dictatorial methods to temporarily halt the student movement. Harris. M. Lentz, *Heads of States and Governments* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 245-46.



exciting moments with sibilant gusts of pleasure, much pleasanter than their fire-eating oratory in the streets.<sup>169</sup>

Dean's vignette not only fuses the appreciation of Shakespeare with passive studiousness but also elevates it onto a pseudo-spiritual level, with the student's 'printed texts' figuring as secular 'prayer missals'. This serves as a polemic to the 'fire-eating oratory in the streets' and establishes the notion that Shakespeare could act as a civilising antidote to the political upheavals convulsing the country. Evidently Dean rationalised Britain's cultural imperialism by reverting to the kind of High Victorian cultural notions that Mathew Arnold espoused almost a century earlier. A belief that Shakespeare represented 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' and that its example could help post-war Egypt live in an atmosphere of 'sweetness and light', was clearly an enabling illusion for cultural administrators to adopt.<sup>170</sup>

Edward Said's autobiography *Out of Place* (1999) provides us with a telling account of how interwar Cairo's famed liberalism was being eroded and replaced by institutionally reinforced colonial binaries following the Second World War. Said attended a matinee performance of Gielgud's *Hamlet* as a nine-year-old student of Cairo's prestigious Victoria College, and narrates a very personal understanding of how the tour's educational outreach functioned as an extension of British imperial rule.<sup>171</sup> He recalled that going to see Gielgud's *Hamlet* entailed careful study and preparation:

Mother's idea was that she and I should gradually read through the play together. For that purpose a beautiful one-volume complete Shakespeare was brought down [...] its handsome red morocco leather binding and delicate onion-skin paper embodying for me all that was luxurious and exciting in a book.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>169</sup> The end of the tour saw Gielgud keep his promise and give his last ever performance as Hamlet before such a school matinee audience. Croall, *Gielgud*, p. 324.

<sup>170</sup> Mathew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics), p. 5, p. 41.

<sup>171</sup> Said described colonial schooling at Victoria College as 'more serious [...] than any I had attended, the pressure greater, the teachers harsher, the students more competitive and sharp, the atmosphere bristling with challenges, punishments, bullies and risks'. Sahar Hamouda and Colin Clement, eds., *Victoria College: A History Revealed* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2002), p. xiii.

<sup>172</sup> Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 51.

The opulence and drama of Fuseli's illustrations seemed to come to life on the Opera

House stage:

I was jolted out of my seat by Gielgud's declaiming, 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us' [...] the trembling resonance of his voice, the darkened windy stage, the distant shining figure of the ghost, all seemed to have brought to life the Fuseli drawing that I had long studied.<sup>173</sup>

Despite the fact that the production raised Said's 'sensuous apprehension to a pitch' he did not think he had 'ever again experienced at quite that intensity', his recollection is also tainted with a sense of alienation and even self-loathing due to his growing awareness of being socially stigmatised as an intruding 'Arab boy'.<sup>174</sup> Despite studying at the most prominent British-administered international school in Cairo:

I was also disheartened by the physical incongruencies between myself and the men, whose green and crimson tights set off fully rounded, perfectly shaped legs, which seemed to mock my spindly, shapeless legs, my awkward carriage, my unskilled movements. Everything about Gielgud and the blond man who played Laertes communicated an ease and confidence of being – they were English heroes after all — that reduced me to inferior status, curtailing my capacities for enjoying the play.<sup>175</sup>

Days later one of Said's Anglo-American classmates invited him to meet Gielgud at his parents' home. He recalled 'it was all I could do to manage a feeble, silent handshake. Gielgud was in a grey suit, but said nothing; he pressed my small hand with an Olympian half-smile'.<sup>176</sup>

Said's autobiographical account evidences both the psychological and social power that the theatre possessed as an extension of British colonial rule. Shakespeare played a powerful role in connecting such education and cultural institutions. The

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<sup>173</sup> Said, pp. 51-52.

<sup>174</sup> Said had recently been prevented from walking to Victoria College by a British stranger who assumed, from his ethnicity, that he was trespassing in the European part of the city.

<sup>175</sup> Said, p. 53.

<sup>176</sup> Said, p. 53.

performance called upon colonial subjects to measure themselves against the very best that the dominant foreign culture had to offer, and the ultimate effect of such solemn veneration was to reinforce a sense of inferiority and exclusion. As Said notes, his ‘capacities for enjoying the play’ were ‘curtailed’ by the performance semiotics: the voices, bodies, and movements of the British performers themselves. He was both attracted and repelled as a culturally interpolated spectator found lacking due to Cairene society’s insistence on his racial inferiority. Substantiating Dean’s account of the reverential atmosphere to be found at school matinees, Said’s task of learning and appreciating Shakespeare appears almost religious in its dutiful intensity. The ways in which Shakespeare linked education and theatre is well illustrated in the connection between the ‘luxuriant’ and ‘exciting’ text and the ‘sensuous apprehension’ of the performance event itself. The production’s staging evidently echoed and reiterated the authoritative visual para-texts within the available textbook edition, securing further links between Shakespeare’s genius and the brilliance of the visiting British theatre company.

Although Said’s account retrospectively fits his autobiographical narrative of an ‘eastern’ outsider passing through a range of ‘western’ institutions, it confirms the kind of internalised responses taking place in reaction to noticeable social trends in Egypt following the war. Increased British intervention in international schooling saw Shakespeare institutionalised and annexed away from any remaining local scene. Although *Hamlet* had been popularly received and performed by both professional and amateur Egyptian groups during the liberal interwar period, deepening British interventions began to change the way Shakespeare was being received in the country.<sup>177</sup> An example of this trend can be found in *Al-Thaqafah*, a popular Egyptian cultural magazine that provided a review of the Gielgud production that seemed written for the benefit of Egyptian readers, but also lacked any critical commentary or views on the

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<sup>177</sup> Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi, ‘*Hamlet* in Arabic’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 20.1 (1999), 43-63.

production's merits or weaknesses. It constituted a simple gloss on the play's meaning, a plot outline, comments on characterisation, and suggestions that audiences should try and read the play (either in English or in a more recent translation from English) in order to properly equip themselves to appreciate the Gielgud Company's staging.<sup>178</sup> Evidently British educational, publishing, and theatrical fields were working in tandem in early post-war Egypt, and were establishing an authoritative status for imported British and English language Shakespeare above that of any surviving local claims. It is noticeable that strategies for post-war colonial education in Egypt seemed to mirror those used in Britain itself before the turn of the century. For Andrew Murphy the specialisation of English Literature within the British education system suggested that 'rather than being a writer to be informally discovered, read and cherished' Shakespeare became 'an author who needed to be studied [...] in the company of properly professional commentators and interpreters'.<sup>179</sup> In post-war Egypt, touring British productions of Shakespeare acted as a supplement to the professionalisation of Shakespeare studies within colonial schooling. Although Wolfit's populism seemed appropriate for the celebrations of 1945, by 1946 England's national poet was already being brought firmly back onto the side of foreign and controlling elites.

## Conclusion

The political events outlined above had distinct Cold War characteristics despite taking place during what is often termed the interregnum period of 1945-1947.<sup>180</sup> On 21 February 1946, a day that saw the largest mass protest bring several Egyptian cities to a standstill, the British Council's Middle East Regional Officer, Brian Jones, wrote to London seeking clarity on the sudden and impressive cultural inroads that America was

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<sup>178</sup> 'Abdel-qadir Al-Samahi, 'Hamlet', *Al-Thaqafah*, 384 (1946), 18-21.

<sup>179</sup> Murphy, p. 173.

<sup>180</sup> On CRD responses to Soviet propaganda activities within the UK itself during the Cold War interregnum period, see Aldrich, 'Putting Culture into the Cold War', 109-33.

making throughout the region. Jones had recently learnt that the United States had raised a staggering \$15,000,000 for investment in the American University of Beirut, The American University in Cairo, and Robert College of Istanbul. This was only their latest expenditure following the recent opening of the brand-new Cairo USA Cultural Centre.<sup>181</sup> Jones commented dryly that ‘it seems that the Americans are to do things in a big way’.<sup>182</sup> To make matters worse, the expansion was making gains on the back of Britain’s beleaguered history in the region and especially its recent attempts at mixing cultural diplomacy and education policy. To illustrate his point Jones included a stinging editorial piece from the local press:

The good reputation of these [American] colleges is due to the fact that they exist solely for educational purposes and have never been propaganda spearheads for any political or economical purposes.<sup>183</sup>

Evidently, any hope that investment in elite schooling would help Britain refashion its image and be viewed as an impartial partner to Egypt’s modernising ambitions withered in the face of encroaching US economic investment and mass student protests demanding Britain’s immediate evacuation. Britain was now competing with other, and more powerful, international actors who also sought to influence the direction of Egypt’s internal affairs. In parallel to its effective programme of economic diplomacy the United States was encouraging young nationalist elements who were both anti-Communist *and* anti-British.<sup>184</sup> At the same time, many student and union factions within the broad anti-British coalition were gaining material support and ideological influence from the Soviet

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<sup>181</sup> Nicolas, J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 19.

<sup>182</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 29/47, General policy: propaganda war in Egypt during 1939-1940, ‘Brian Jones to Furness’, 21 February 1946.

<sup>183</sup> TNA: BW 29/47, ‘Brian Jones to Furness’, 21 February 1946.

<sup>184</sup> Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 12.

Union, especially following the recent scrapping of a wartime ban on Communist political materials.<sup>185</sup>

The characteristic Cold War dynamic of superpower antagonisms being played out within anti-imperial struggles could be seen in Egypt in 1946. The country's ensuing process of decolonisation would be complicated and determined by British, American, and Soviet gamesmanship within its territory. The occupying British suddenly found the limited resources of soft power that it did possess vital for maintaining the illusion of continuing global prestige. However, following the traumas of the Second World War, the scale of investment and propaganda required to compete within the new global dispensation would be beyond Britain's reach in Egypt.

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<sup>185</sup> Abdalla, p. 69-79. Post-war Soviet foreign policy towards North Africa between 1944 and 1947 was built on the mistaken assumption that Moscow could take advantage of intense Western competition seeking to shape the re-division of the post-war world (rather than Europe and Britain ultimately seeking protection within an American-led, unipolar capitalist world order). Westad, pp. 58-59. Soviet planners even calculated that their 'presence in North and East Africa' would 'not be opposed by the United States' but encouraged as an anti-imperial advance and 'as a way of weakening English influence'. In Westad, p. 60.

## Chapter 2.

### Shakespeare and Re-colonisation: *Richard III* in Australia and *The Tempest* in England

In 1948 the American film producer Samuel Goldwyn asked Laurence Olivier, ‘Why are you, the greatest actor in the world, taking a touring company to Australia of all places?’<sup>1</sup> In prioritising an Old Vic circuit of *Richard III* to Australia and New Zealand, Olivier sacrificed four film contracts including Hollywood adaptations of *Othello* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897), a British comedy with Vivien Leigh, and a personal project to direct and star in a Shakespeare biopic.<sup>2</sup> For Olivier, despite these creative and commercial losses, the Commonwealth Tour was vital for securing the Old Vic’s candidacy to become England’s National Theatre. In order to finance this ambition Olivier Lyttelton, Lord Esher (a member of the Old Vic Governors as well as Chairman of the British Council’s Drama Advisory Committee), and Tyrone Guthrie (then secretary of the Old Vic Governors) had set up a joint committee correctly thinking that a demonstration of the Old Vic engaged in cultural diplomacy would help secure enormous government funding. Indeed, during the tour the British Treasury announced that it was prepared to provide a million pounds towards the future venture.

As well as establishing a theatre school, Olivier envisioned splitting the Old Vic company into three parts, with one playing London, one touring England, and one in America:

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<sup>1</sup> In Terry Coleman, *Olivier: The Authorised Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Forsyth, pp. 200-01; Garry O’Connor, *Darlings of the Gods: One Year in the Lives of Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), p. 116.

we could have a proper little Empire [...] I'll get together a company and I'll go to Australia for the best part of a year [...] they will be a decent company by the time I get back. It will be respectable and worthy of being called one of the National Theatre companies.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside his world famous wife Vivien Leigh Olivier led 'from the front' with the glamorous couple settling into the role of 'star' actor-managers in a manner that led them to be nicknamed 'God and the Angel'. Oliver felt that their global celebrity would help 'leaven the sepulchral destiny inevitably associated with such institutions' and stated that he felt he was embarking on the beginning of a grand twelve-year plan.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the national and political symbolism of the journey couldn't have been more loaded. As Garry O'Connor asks, 'what could be more directly in the line of duty of a National Theatre after a world war than to be leading a triumphantly successful tour of the Dominions?'<sup>5</sup> However, despite the Oliviers' personal investment, the Old Vic's institutional support and ambition, and the Empire building spirit being so clearly resurgent in this post-war generation of theatre practitioners, the project was ultimately a failure. Olivier was to return to London fired from his position at the Old Vic, the lift the tour was meant to provide Australian theatre failed to materialise, whilst the establishment of an English National theatre remained simply an ambition.

In this chapter I explain how and why this tour took place within a colonial and Cold War context that demanded the strengthening of what was then termed 'Greater-British' ties. I consider what broad Cold War and colonial concerns lay behind the undertaking of this 'Commonwealth Tour'. What possible role could Shakespeare have played in addressing Anglo-Australian political and commercial issues at the time? In what ways was the desire to establish an English National Theatre coupled with the ambition of establishing an Australian one as well? Finally we can consider what impact

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<sup>3</sup> In Coleman, p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> O'Connor, p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> O'Connor, p. 100.



the tour had on Australia's theatrical culture, especially in regards to Shakespeare. Did it help foster a genuine spread of interest in Shakespeare as popular or universal dramatist, or was a particularly English claim on Shakespeare promoted as the most effective means of leveraging British interests?

Immediately following the Old Vic's Commonwealth Tour, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (SMT) embarked on two of its own, under the management of its new director Anthony Quayle. Similarly to the Old Vic, Quayle realised that in order to re-establish his regional theatre as a viable candidate for England's National Theatre he would have to demonstrate its global use and potential. By 1951 he was publicly declaring that:

The fruits of Foreign Policy, to date, are two overseas tours. A start was made when the company visited Australia in the autumn and winter of 1949 [...] Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide [...] the tour was financially successful [...] it was also theatrically successful [...] But the real success and fascination of the adventure [...] lay in the linking of the Elizabethan age to our own [...] Shakespeare must have often seen the ships and talked with the men who were then seeking *Terra Australis*. And here now was Shakespeare's own company of players, acting his plays to their kinsmen in that very *Terra Australis* – that strange, old-new land beneath the globe.<sup>6</sup>

What domestic political ideas were shaping such late imperial rhetoric, and in what ways was Shakespeare being used to pull disparate historical, racial, and political notions together? As Quayle's second tour coincided with the Coronation of Elizabeth II and foreshadowed her subsequent tour of the Dominions, we can also consider how the Shakespeare industry synchronised with the ideology around such larger displays of British constitutional power.

Finally, within a context of increased metropolitan migration, early 1950s Britain witnessed the rise of parallel, though politically divergent, strategies for national re-

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<sup>6</sup> Ivor Brown and Anthony Quayle, *Shakespeare Memorial Theatre 1948-1950: A Photographic Record* (London: Reinhardt and Evans, 1951), p. 15.

imagining. In social and cultural terms, these included New Elizabethanism on the political right and New Britishness on the left. Given that the SMT tours were exploiting the enormous Australian appetite for British culture at the time, it is appropriate to also consider the reverse migration of Australian theatre talent ‘back’ to post-war Britain.<sup>7</sup> What kind of impact did ‘returning’ Australian theatre artists have on Britain’s Shakespeare industry? Did their artistic vision complicate or consolidate the Greater-British myth that the metropole was forging at the time? As an illustrative case study, I will consider how the work of the Australian stage designer Loudon Sainthill engendered ambiguous and challenging modes of representation upon the early-1950s Shakespearean stage. Specifically I explore how his work on Michael Benthall’s *The Tempest* during the SMT’s 1951 to 1952 Festival of Britain seasons, replaced heritage notions of Britishness with more contemporary, international, and popular modes of representation, that invited Cold War and anti-colonial interpretations.

### **The Post-War Re-colonisation of Australia**

The arrival of the British Council in Australia signalled a new stage in the post-war consolidation of Greater-Britain, the long union of the United Kingdom to its white-settler Dominions. James Belich states that although Greater-Britain possessed ‘no formal shape, no federal constitution’ it was ‘an important economic and cultural reality, a creature of re-colonisation’.<sup>8</sup> Although politically separate entities (Australia was Federated in 1901 and enjoyed nominal parity with the UK since the Statute of Westminster Commonwealth Acts of 1931 and 1942) this Anglo-world was strongly unified, both culturally and economically, up to and beyond the stresses of the Second

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<sup>7</sup> On Australia’s enormous appetite for British culture, and the migration of white-settler elites between Australia and London see, Kate Darian-Smith and Patricia Grimshaw, eds., *Britishness Abroad*. For Australasia more broadly see, Felicity Barnes, *New Zealand’s London: A Colony and its Metropolis* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, p. 460.

World War. Following the rhythm of economic cycles, boom periods (such as the creation of Melbourne within a single generation) witnessed ‘explosive colonisation’, whilst bust periods (like that immediately following the Second World War) were characterised by re-colonisation. Typically this meant the reintegration of peripheral settler economies, including their cultural and social gravitation, back towards the dominant metropolitan centre.<sup>9</sup>

The strengthening interdependence of British-Australian economic ties in the mid-to-late 1940s can most clearly be seen in the way in which Australia and New Zealand functioned as primary goods producers within Britain’s world system. London’s ability to mitigate its post-war economic duress through the bulk buying of Australian food produce at well below international market prices, illustrates the important dynamics of the relationship. Such economic exploitation needed to be mitigated by the strengthening of social and cultural ties. Fortunately for Britain, despite having briefly turned to the United States for military protection and export markets in 1942, many Australians were more than willing to ‘turn back the clock’ after 1945.<sup>10</sup> Commentators have noted that kinship was a key consideration, with the sense of a shared British identity arguably being more powerful than an independent Australian one for many at the time. An opinion poll in late 1947 found that sixty-five per cent of Australians preferred to keep their British nationality rather than have a separate Australian one. Such attitudes led Robert Menzies (Australia’s longest serving Prime Minister from 1939-1941 and 1949-1966) to declare that ‘the boundaries of Great Britain are not on the Kentish coast but at Cape York and Invercargill’.<sup>11</sup> Despite the continuing social influence that Britain was able to enjoy in Australia, it should also be noted that the post-

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<sup>9</sup> Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> When Britain finally did join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, ‘Greater-Britain was no more, and mourning was short-circuited by the growing pretence that it had never existed’. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, pp. 471-72.

<sup>11</sup> In Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, p. 464. See also Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: The Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), pp. 13-27.

war relationship was far from one of subjugation. Australia's parity with Britain since the turn of the century saw it increasingly and instinctively prioritise its own strategic and national interests, whilst simultaneously considering itself an integral part of the Greater-British project.

Australia provides a vivid example of how straitened financial conditions helped guarantee the growing use of culture in British diplomacy in the late 1940s. In a return to pre-war commercial practices, although Clement Atlee's Foreign Office policy directive 'The Projection of Britain' instructed all Information Departments to spread 'British ideas and British standards' abroad, emphasis was placed especially on the 'promotion of British exports, and the explanation of British trade policy'.<sup>12</sup> As rationing continued into the post-war period, Britain relied heavily on its protected sterling area of key imports, especially foodstuffs. In terms of re-colonisation, overt attempts to associate the export of Australian food with the reciprocal importation of British culture can clearly be seen in the British Council's earliest press coverage:

Britain, in her tremendous struggle to defeat the hideous cults and forces that waged war on humanity, sacrificed her material treasure and, with it, much of her strength in the realm of power politics: but that she has not lost a deeper source of power is seen in the work of the British Council, to whom we owe credit for the visit of the Boyd Neel Orchestra.<sup>13</sup>

The Boyd Neel Orchestra were a London based string orchestra famous for commissioning and performing pieces composed by Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten. They toured Europe and the UK extensively before the war and the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe for half a decade following it.<sup>14</sup>

Although it seems incongruous that touring English orchestras and repertory theatre

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<sup>12</sup> Defty, pp. 28-29.

<sup>13</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 12/4 Australia: Reports, 1947-1953, 'Sydney Press Release', 24 April 1947.

<sup>14</sup> Boyd Neel, *The Story of an Orchestra* (London: Vox Mundi, 1950); Boyd Neel and J. David Finch, *My Orchestra and Other Adventures: The Memoires of Boyd Neel* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1985).

companies could achieve much in terms of alleviating Britain's post-war slump, Philip M. Taylor notes that although propaganda may ultimately fail to 'disguise weakness or the realities of decline' it can still have real immediate benefits for the economy by providing an 'illusion of strength and confidence' convincing enough to 'aid foreign policy objectives in effective short term ways'.<sup>15</sup>

The Boyd Neel Orchestra helped advertise Britain's 'deeper source of power' and glossed over the depth of its post-war debt crisis and ebbing global influence in the face of American and Russian advances, as well as circulating shared tastes, values, and ideas throughout the Anglo-world.<sup>16</sup> The Old Vic tour of *Richard III* functioned in a similar way by deploying the magic of 'celebrity' in order to personalise a British plea for charity that targeted the goodwill of individual Australian citizens. Olivier and Leigh's international fame was crucial to the success of this cultural-economic mission, with the Australian actor Michael Blakemore capturing the specific nature of their fame and celebrity during the late 1940s and early 1950s. For him the Oliviers were:

stars whose two-dimensional image had been among the first to spread across the world like a virus. In that brief period of 'the talkies', before the theatre had lost its prestige with the general public, before television [...] this acting elite held sway in both mediums [...] they were famous, rich, lacquered in glamour and magically skilled [...] Olivier [...] had somehow juggled huge celebrity with artistic achievements of the highest order.<sup>17</sup>

The British Food Appeal aimed at persuading Australians to donate 1000 tonnes of livestock to Britain every week through the voluntary surrender of 6,500,000 meat coupons. This was the equivalent of one coupon per month and roughly a seventh of

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<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Belich dates the creation of the Anglo-world from the end of the American War of Independence in 1783. Although politically divided, trade and cultural exchange actually increased immediately following the thirteen colonies' break from Great Britain. The broader Anglo-world also includes the white-settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa, and constitutes a 'sub-global, yet transnational, intercontinental [...] melange of partners and subjects' with the transfer of 'things, thoughts, and people, lubricated by shared language and culture'. Belich, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Blakemore, *Arguments with England* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), pp. 148-49.

every Australian's meat ration. The appeal clearly needed additional celebrity endorsement because after its first month in May 1947, only 250,000 coupons had been donated.<sup>18</sup>

Besides trade, the immediate post-war period saw the Cold War take on its more formal and antagonistic features, leading to concerns over rapidly deteriorating geopolitical relations and the rising importance of Empire intelligence security. Most pressing were worries over Australia's internal problems with Soviet infiltration, especially given its growing strategic importance following Britain's loss of India and the perceived spread of Communism throughout South-East Asia. Consequently, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) was established under close British guidance in July 1948, following the discovery of continuing Soviet espionage and high-level intelligence leaks dating back as far as 1943.<sup>19</sup> On a more cultural level, and immediately following the arrival of the British Council in Australia, the 'Interdepartmental Committee to Advise and Assist the British Council on Relations with External Territories of Australia' was created. Its aim was to consolidate Australia's ostensible role as co-partner in the projection of Greater-British culture into non-settler colonies. In the committee's first meeting, the surprising ambition was established that Australia would eventually serve as the base for such projections into South-East Asia.<sup>20</sup> This forecasted growth in integrated Greater-British cultural diplomacy mirrored Britain's early Cold War strategy of rebuilding relations with its Dominions and dependent colonies upon 'robust' economic lines. Despite the pressure to decolonise, Empire became essential to British aims of paying off its wartime debts to the US as well as countering the spread of Communism across the region. In the specific terms of the

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<sup>18</sup> Anon, 'Meat Coupons For British Food Appeal Fund', *Morning Bulletin*, 28 May 1947, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> On the strategic importance of Commonwealth Security for Britain's post-war status, especially in the broader terms of Anglo-American Intelligence sharing, see Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 103-13.

<sup>20</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, General Report March to June 1947, 'Notes on the First Meeting of the Inter-Departmental Committee set up to advise and Assist the British Council on its Relations with the External Territories of Australasia', 18 June 1947.

Australasian sphere of the late 1940s, this meant renewed investment in the economic resources of Malaysia, Borneo, and Singapore, due to rubber and tin's dollar-earning potential.<sup>21</sup> This was followed by the Malayan Emergency between 1948 and 1960 that saw British, Australian, and other Commonwealth forces deployed to 'protect' plantations and counter the rural uprising led by the Communist inspired Malayan National Liberation Army.<sup>22</sup>

Given the sense of threat from both anti-imperial uprisings in nearby Malaya, and domestic Soviet infiltration at home, the consolidation of the Anglophone news media provides a final instance of the pressing need to recolonise Australia and culturally reintegrate it with the UK. The committee set up to advise the British Council on Australia's relations with external territories noted the urgent need to strengthen Anglo-Australasian links through news-sharing companies such as Reuters. In a sense this was the latest stage in a trend towards greater consolidation that had started with Empire Service broadcasts back in 1932. The new possibilities inherent to broadcast media were instrumental in the maintenance of the 'imagined community' of Greater-Britain, providing the kind of shared cultural content that could maintain social and economic cohesion throughout the global white population under the British flag.<sup>23</sup> In competitive Cold War terms, it also signals how urgently the Greater-British project aimed at reversing America's wartime encroachment into Britain's Dominions. The Australian Associated Press and New Zealand Press Association had agreed to join in the ownership of the London based Reuters News Company in March 1947 through no

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<sup>21</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, pp. 559-60.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Curtis, *Web of Deceit: Britain's Real Role in the World* (London: Vintage Books, 2003), pp. 334-45; Robert Jackson, *The Malayan Emergency and Indonesian Confrontation: The Commonwealth's Wars 1948-1966* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> This cultural service carried 'identity as well as information' with the Australian book trade, for instance, being 'almost entirely in British hands' before the war. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, pp. 460-61. See also Adrienne Munich, 'In the Radio Way: Elizabeth II, the Female Voice-Over, and Radio's Imperial Effects', in *Communities of the Air: Radio Century Radio Culture*, ed. by Susan Merrill Squire (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 217-36. Although Benedict Anderson's original phrase refers to the formation of nation states, my use here exceeds this to incorporate metropolitan and white settler-colonial citizenry. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 2006), pp. 5-7.

‘ordinary business deal’ but one characterised as having ‘ideal’ motives ‘designed to widen the ownership and strengthen the competitive power of the only British owned *world* news service’.<sup>24</sup> Overall, the Shakespeare tours that I will discuss seemed to have been the most visible manifestation of a broad spectrum of diplomatic activities aimed at establishing closer Anglo-Australian ties in the face of pressing anti-Communist and colonial considerations.

Perhaps as a result of such pressing political needs, the British Council were keenly alert to any potential public objections to their establishment in Australia from the outset. On a pragmatic level its administrators realised that preparation for the Old Vic tour under a blizzard of advanced publicity would provide ideal cover for the establishment of a network of British Council offices across each Australian state. As one internal report phrased it, it was hoped that the tour’s preparation would ‘appear to justify’ the British Council’s ‘presence and also help to allay any suspicions that [...] [we are] there to push any political propaganda under the guise of cultural activity’.<sup>25</sup>

Although the stated policy upon arrival in Australia in 1947 was to ‘hasten slowly’ and find out in what ways the British Council could ‘best fit in with the wishes and interests of Australia’, from the outset the tour was freighted with a range of specific schemes aimed at exploiting many of the opportunities that greater UK-Australian integration offered.<sup>26</sup> From the Old Vic’s point of view, central to these was Britain’s intention of persuading Australia to establish a National Theatre of its own. The overt narrative was that the tour would provide a positive and ‘decisive stimulus’ for

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<sup>24</sup> Donald Read, *The Power of the News: The History of Reuters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 259.

<sup>25</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, ‘General Report March to June 1947’, 24 April 1947. Charles Wilmot set up advance British Council administrative units in each area to be visited during the tour. O’Connor, p. 84; Felix Barker, *The Oliviers: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), p. 270. The planned tour itinerary was, *School For Scandal* at Perth’s Capitol Theatre, 20-28 March; *Richard III* and *Skin of Our Teeth* at Adelaide’s Theatre Royal, 3-18 April; *School for Scandal*, *Richard III* and *Skin of Our Teeth* at Melbourne’s Princess Theatre, 20 April to 12 June; *School for Scandal* at Hobart’s Theatre Royal, 14-20 June; *School for Scandal*, *Richard III* and *Skin of our Teeth* at Sydney’s Tivoli Theatre, 29 June to 21 July; *School for Scandal* at Brisbane’s His Majesty’s, from 21 August to 3 September. TNA: BW 12/4, ‘Representative’s Report for January to August 1948’, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, ‘Representative’s Report for January to August 1948’.



transforming Australia's theatre scene. It would not only boost attendance and revenue, but also provide 'a turning point in the policy of its theatre management', undermining 'the opinion that good drama cannot be made to pay here'.<sup>27</sup> Although merely advisory, the various ways in which the Old Vic's Commonwealth Tour was used to launch the movement for an Australian National Theatre suggests a prepared and coordinated strategy. The broad outline of such a scheme can be gleaned in administrative reports that considered the project a 'problem' that:

must be tackled federally. The best solution would be for some commonwealth authority to set up an organisation for starting a National Theatre, the Commonwealth Education Office perhaps [...] The Australian treasury is not short of funds. It is willing to expend large amounts on the National University in Canberra. What one hopes is that the Australian authorities will come to realise the appalling condition of Australian theatre and the opportunity they have to remedy it. The national 'theatre' should, of course, not be a building but two or three companies who would train and perform more or less on the lines of the Old Vic [...] [the Old Vic tour] will [...] have a stimulating effect on Australian drama. It will show up the deficiencies and low standards of Australian theatre. But this will merely cause frustration and despondency unless their visit is followed up with positive assistance. One thing that is wanted is plain – skilled and experienced producers willing to undertake a pioneering job inviting the certainty of a good deal of heart-break.<sup>28</sup>

It was recognised that with the possibility of federal funding, a great opportunity lay ahead for 'pioneering' cultural bodies that could exploit the 'raw material and enthusiasm' of Australia's fledgling professional theatre scene along with its potential audiences and revenues. The best examples of British theatre would stimulate the kind of demand that only Britain's more 'skilled men of the stage' could then go on to satisfy. This situation would open up enormous financial opportunities for the Old Vic Theatre back in London, and be integral to its own candidature as England's Nation Theatre. An early example of how British practices were anticipating such future arrangements can be seen

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<sup>27</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, 'Report of British Council Representative in Australia For Period 10 January to 5 February, 1947', p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, 'Representative's Report for January to August 1948'.

in Olivier's auditioning of Australian talent throughout the tour. Beyond the astonishing receipts that the venture itself would generate, other forms of cultural export from the settler economy were encouraged, when the Old Vic began recruiting the best grant-funded Dominion talent for its new Theatre School back in London.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Old Vic's *Richard III* in Europe (1945) and Australia (1948)**

The notion that a Shakespeare production led by Laurence Olivier would best promote Britain's cultural strengths had its roots in some of the more successful instances of wartime cultural projection. In fact the Old Vic's touring production of *Richard III* had already been deployed across Europe immediately following Donald Wolfit's tour during the final stages of the Second World War. This was itself preceded by Olivier's greatest achievement in using Shakespeare for British national mobilisation, with his film adaptation of *Henry V* (1944).<sup>30</sup> In enjoying popular success with both audiences and critics, adapting Shakespeare into a new cinematic grammar, and giving British cinema international spread and acclaim, *Henry V* set a high benchmark that demonstrated what Shakespeare could achieve as national propaganda.<sup>31</sup> Part of the film's effectiveness was its ability to synthesise many of mid twentieth century Britain's diverse claims on Shakespeare ownership, and pressing them into national service. Utilising the most effective form of popular entertainment, and arguably the medium with the greatest impact on people's cultural life at the time, the successful translation of Shakespeare onto the big screen provided access to a truly mass audience. Olivier's adaptation brought Shakespeare back across class divisions by suspending the grinding notion that it was

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<sup>29</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, 'General Report March to June 1947'. Stephen Alomes reports that actors 'blessed in Britain' with metropolitan stage experience gained the respect of the provincial elites that represented the majority of Australian theatregoers from the 1950s onwards. Stephen Alomes, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> In autumn 1942 Olivier was temporarily released from the Navy by the Ministry of Information to 'make two pictures, one of which was *Henry V*'. Laurence Olivier, *Five Seasons of the Old Vic Theatre Company*, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Michael W. Boyce, *The Lasting Influence of the War on Post-war British Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 119.

worthy and improving, whilst on a formal level it demonstrated how theatrical and cinematic art forms could be harmonised successfully. Furthermore it satisfied some of the modernist tastes that had typified the pre-war theatre scene, as Olivier quickly learnt how to import cinematic techniques back into the theatre itself. The film adaptation of *Henry V* not only managed to achieve this sense of social cohesion and unity on both artistic and political levels, it also reiterated some useful national myths for boosting morale at a key stage in the war. Unsurprisingly, the sense that Shakespeare could be called upon as effective cultural propaganda would excite the establishment imagination thereafter and influence cultural diplomatic practice well into the Cold War era.<sup>32</sup>

Just prior to the end of the Second World War, Olivier and Ralph Richardson were released from active military service on the grounds of their ‘indispensability to the rehabilitation of the Old Vic’ that was considered ‘a matter of national importance’.<sup>33</sup> Assisted by generous Arts Council funding for the time, Olivier and Richardson were tasked with helping the Old Vic settle into its temporary London residence at The New Theatre with their highly successful 1944 repertoire of Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* (1867), George Bernard Shaw’s *Arms and the Man* (1898), and William Shakespeare’s *Richard III*.<sup>34</sup> Although Tyrone Guthrie and Emlyn Williams had previously failed to bring *Richard III* back into fashion with their 1937 production, the war years witnessed a marked revival in the play’s reception through popular productions first by Donald Wolfit, and then by Olivier himself. Wolfit’s inimitable style began a trend that moved away from the ‘poetry, passion and pathos’ of interwar staging and towards more populist heights of

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<sup>32</sup> Although Emma Smith’s stage history of *Henry V* provides great detail on various productions of the play, she does not touch upon British Council sponsored foreign tours. See, Emma Smith, *Shakespeare in Production: Henry V* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 50-62. On Olivier’s film version of *Henry V*, see Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 140-46; Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 47-69; Anthony Davies, *Filming Shakespeare’s Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 26-39; Peter Donaldson, *Shakespearean Films/Shakespearean Directors* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 1-30.

<sup>33</sup> Guthrie, p. 203.

<sup>34</sup> Guthrie, pp. 188-89.

melodrama; an effective shift in approaching the play that Olivier would build upon and perfect technically.<sup>35</sup> Talking of his 1942 Strand Theatre production, Wolfit stated that:

The more I studied [Richard] the greater grew his resemblance to Hitler [...] My wig of long red hair with a cowlick over the forehead gave a most curious resemblance, in an impressionistic way, to the Fuhrer.<sup>36</sup>

What would have appeared embarrassingly stagey to interwar audiences became acceptable within the context of the wartime struggle against Nazism, as ‘the spectacle of unexplained evil no longer [seemed] incredible or shocking’.<sup>37</sup> Olivier’s *Richard III* incorporated some of the spirit of Wolfit’s somewhat melodramatic nineteenth-century mode of presentation, leading critics such as Harold Hobson and James Agate to be struck by the shameless theatricality that he brought to the part.<sup>38</sup>

Richard is presented as a monstrous fact, a *fait accompli*, the solitary spectacle of it is a wonder, a nightmare, an extraordinary phenomenon, but without context it is unrelated to anything that might make it more than good theatre.<sup>39</sup>

Although this Richard appeared to have ‘no inwardness’, Olivier established a broader social context for the characterisation’s meaning within the audience’s own wartime experiences, especially by audaciously addressing his soliloquies directly to them.<sup>40</sup> In breaking this fourth wall convention, ‘tipping the wink’ directly to playgoers, and gleefully revealing his evil intentions in audience asides before then carrying them out, Olivier’s portrayal was clearly pitched towards popular conceptions of Hitler’s mental traits. As Edward Spears, the leading British liaison officer between British and French forces during the war famously asserted, Hitler had a tendency to ‘announce beforehand

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<sup>35</sup> Julie Hankey, ed., *Richard the Third: Plays in Performance* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1988), p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> Wolfit, p. 205.

<sup>37</sup> Hugh M. Richmond, *King Richard III: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> Richmond, p. 57.

<sup>39</sup> In Richmond, p. 58.

<sup>40</sup> Hankey, p. 68.

with amazing audacity what he intended doing – then did it’.<sup>41</sup> Alan Dent’s pen portrait of Olivier’s Richard stated that his:

range of expression is extraordinary, even for him, his eyes are Machiavellian, his nose is a sinister sonnet of Baudelaire, and his hands in his scarlet gloves are quick and shrewd. He lives the life of Richard with an almost alarming gusto, and he dies the death horribly – like an earthworm cut in two.<sup>42</sup>

In placing a strong interpretative stamp upon a corrupt text and then transforming it into an idiosyncratic production well suited to its historical moment, Olivier had an enormous impact on the play’s subsequent staging.<sup>43</sup>

Eleven days after the conflict within the European theatre of war ended on 8 May 1945, ENSA engaged the Old Vic Company to tour their 1944 season on the continent. Starting in Hamburg, this Victory Tour was greeted by scenes of total devastation in the middle of which stood, miraculously intact, the grand Staatliche Schauspielhaus Theatre. Given the exceptional circumstances of the tour, the production’s reported popularity is questionable. Basil Dean, whose job it was to promote ENSA’s success, stated that with troops pouring into the theatre from miles around Hamburg, ‘never has classical drama been performed to greater enthusiasm’.<sup>44</sup> Peter Copely, one of the company’s actors, stated more pragmatically that ‘they packed the theatre every night, and we thought, Ah, this is the young audience of the future. But they had absolutely nothing else to do’.<sup>45</sup> The Victory Tour even played Bergen-Belsen concentration camp when Robert Collis, the head of the Red Cross medical team stationed there, requested a visit. It was only two months after its liberation, with five

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<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Literary Churchill: Author, Reader, Actor* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 315.

<sup>42</sup> In O’Connor, p. 162.

<sup>43</sup> Hankey, p. 63. Olivier perpetuated the theatrical tradition of staging Colley Cibber’s radical 1700 revision of *Richard III* rather than the Folio and Quarto scripts attributed to Shakespeare. On Cibber’s *Richard III*, see Hankey, pp. 48-53.

<sup>44</sup> Dean, *Theatre at War*, p. 481.

<sup>45</sup> In Jonathan Croall, *Sybil Thorndike: A Star of Life* (London: Haus Books, 2008), p. 345.

hundred troops overseeing forty thousand inmates.<sup>46</sup> Sybil Thorndike recalled the shock of seeing some of the ten thousand unburied corpses the camp contained at the time, and felt that the performances were given in ‘a haze, a nasty evil-smelling haze’.<sup>47</sup> Though such apocalyptic scenes must have jarred sickeningly with the celebratory tone of the Victory Tour, it concluded in more conventional triumph with a two-week residency at the Comedie Française, enjoying the prestige and symbolism of being the first foreign company to ever perform in France’s National Theatre, and doing so during the 14 July celebrations that immediately followed the war.<sup>48</sup>

In March 1948, arriving in Australia months later than intended due to Olivier’s filming of *Hamlet*, the Old Vic company gave 179 performances of *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), *Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), and *Richard III* mostly in converted cinemas characterised by demanding acoustics and hundred degree temperatures. The public response was overwhelmingly positive with audiences largely made up of people who had rarely or never seen a stage play before. The opening performance of *Richard III* drew an additional crowd of eight thousand people who gathered simply to watch the audience enter the theatre.<sup>49</sup> Although the tour basked in Australia’s enormous appetite for British celebrity culture at the time, Olivier complained that his diplomatic duties bordered on the absurd. To his embarrassment he twice found himself taking the salute at a naval march past, and:

For grand balls and any big occasion a speech was always expected, but even at small gatherings someone would toast the King in a cup of tea and one was on, replying to the toast apparently on behalf of the King.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Collis, *To Be a Pilgrim* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), p. 103.

<sup>47</sup> Croall, *Thorndike*, p. 349.

<sup>48</sup> Croall, *Thorndike*, p. 350.

<sup>49</sup> Anthony Holden, *Olivier* (London: Little Books, 2007), p. 232.

<sup>50</sup> O’Connor, p. 109.

The difficulties that Olivier encountered as a result of this awkward quasi-ambassadorial role were often self-inflicted, largely due to his misunderstanding and mishandling of many Australian's deep ambivalence towards Britain following the stresses of World War Two. In truth, Australia's feverish enthusiasm for all things British also contained a great deal of unresolved hostility. This had been most recently exacerbated by such traumas as the fall of Singapore in 1942, and the subsequent invasion scare that led to calls for Australian troops fighting in Burma and the Middle East to be returned home to defend their own country. After describing the capitulation of Singapore the 'greatest disaster to British arms in history' Churchill refused to concede the Australian prime minister's demands suggesting the country 'turn to America free of any pangs as to our traditional links with the United Kingdom'.<sup>51</sup> The head of the British Council's Dominions section Sir Angus Gillan, first conceived of an Australian tour in order to soften this anti-British mood following the war.<sup>52</sup> This common mistrust of British power surfaced in Melbourne through press questions that often began with the line, 'Now that Britain is finished ...'.<sup>53</sup> Easily goaded, Olivier fatefully took the bait at the Empire youth rally in Melbourne Town Hall and delivered an impromptu lecture 'on the twin themes of monarchy and empire'. At the Anzac Day celebrations, he strained Anglo-Australian relations further when giving a long and impassioned speech stating that:

Britain is not finished. She is merely doing what she has done throughout history – starting again [...] If one of your most loving relations in the Mother Country thought for a moment that any of your kindness was provoked by pity, they would hope that not another food parcel, and not even a thought or a sigh, would come from Australia.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> James Lawrence, *Churchill and Empire: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London: Phoenix, 2013), p. 276, p. 287.

<sup>52</sup> Holden, p. 225.

<sup>53</sup> Holden, p. 233.

<sup>54</sup> Holden, p. 234.

In a sharp and immediate response the speech's live radio broadcast was cut-off half way through. For a long period after, the tour's performances experienced a much cooler reception, and Olivier's tour diary ended abruptly as the strain of mixing stardom and diplomacy finally took its toll.

Back in Britain, the National Theatre Joint-Committee's scheme for ensuring Government backing came to fruition. In April Olivier wrote Lord Esher 'a tiny note of warmth and appreciation from the southern hemisphere about the cool million that has miraculously descended on us all from governmental skies'. Esher replied on 9 July with a surprise 'Memorandum on the Future Administration of the Old Vic' that refused to renew Olivier, Richardson, and Burrell's contracts. It stated that the company:

could no longer be run by men, however able, who have other calls upon their time and talent [...] I cannot close without sending you the appreciation of the Governors for the great work, not only for England but for the reputation of the Old Vic, that you and the Company have accomplished in the Dominions.<sup>55</sup>

In response, Olivier wrote:

In spite of the delightfully charming tone of your letter [...] one was apt to picture oneself as a pioneer disowned by his country in the middle of a very distant campaign [...] one has become accustomed to thinking of anything for the Old Vic in terms of continuity.<sup>56</sup>

As Olivier clearly considered his time in Australia as 'doing active service in the colonies' on behalf of Britain's national interests, he viewed Lord Esher's actions as a betrayal taken opportunistically while he and Richardson were out of the country and unable to organise a collective response.<sup>57</sup> Tyrone Guthrie was also unsympathetic to Olivier and

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<sup>55</sup> In Coleman, p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> O'Connor, pp. 122-23.

<sup>57</sup> Holden, p. 238.



Richardson's position however, letting it be known that he 'objected' to the Old Vic being 'run by a pair of actor manager knights'.<sup>58</sup>

The main criticism against Olivier was that while he was enjoying the life of a globetrotting celebrity, the Old Vic's season in London had been poor due to neglect. Jealousy and mistrust also played a part as publicity of the Australian tour's feverish reception fed back to the austerity-era British press. The gap between Commonwealth diplomacy and metropolitan realities was significant and, in the open arena of public scrutiny, the tour had created contradictory discourses of national pride alongside feelings of envy and suspicion. In actual financial terms, gross takings for the Australia tour were an enormous £226,318. Of this sum the British Council received £42,000 after tax. The Oliviers received £5000 as their personal share, whilst the Old Vic's large cut not only wiped out all of its London losses but also made a surplus for the 1948-1949 season.<sup>59</sup> Despite the Old Vic tour relying heavily upon Olivier and Leigh's celebrity to give it the popular appeal it needed to show global potential, the 'cool million' towards the establishment of an English National Theatre would be provisionally associated with the Old Vic trust regardless of whether Olivier was at the helm or not.

Following Esher's 'betrayal' (and while still officially advising Australia on the establishment of their own National Theatre and recruiting students for the Old Vic's Theatre School), Olivier promptly began to work towards his own interests. Now acting as a private scout for Australian talent, he started recruiting for Laurence Olivier Productions (LOP), a hundred pound limited liability company that he had formed in 1947 following advice from his agent Cecil Tennant. In successfully luring Peter Finch, one of Australia's finest actors, into his London company Olivier stated that 'practicability is my god' and 'adaptability the most natural of the human ways of this

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<sup>58</sup> O'Connor, pp. 113-14.

<sup>59</sup> Barker, p. 283; O'Connor, p. 158.

world'.<sup>60</sup> He even managed to persuade Peter Hiley who was in charge of the Old Vic tour's social programme, to quit the British Council and become LOP's company secretary instead. Olivier's methods clearly displayed the same entrepreneurial, opportunistic, and 'pioneering' spirit that characterised the national mission he was initially employed to undertake. On either a private or state level, Britain's theatre establishment aimed at exploiting Australia's cultural cringe in order to repatriate its best talents back to the metropolis and to open up new lucrative Dominion markets for itself abroad.

### **The Commonwealth Tour's Legacy**

Although the story of the Old Vic's Commonwealth Tour had been one of packed houses, 'tumultuous applause', and enthusiastic audiences often travelling 'hundreds of miles [...] to see a single performance' its immediate effect on Australia's cultural landscape seemed negligible and the medium-to-long-term impact difficult to measure.<sup>61</sup> Tyrone Guthrie soon followed up the Old Vic's visit, ostensibly to do a lecture tour on British Drama, though it also provided the opportunity to meet various representatives of Australia's theatrical institutions and discuss 'the problems around the setting up of some sort of National Theatre'.<sup>62</sup> In 1949, Guthrie's report was handed over to the British Council for printing:

A copy was sent to the Prime Minister, with whom he had had discussions in Canberra. This report is already bearing fruit. A few weeks ago the Prime Minister announced that he was willing to put up £30,000 for a National Theatre scheme if the states would do likewise, making a total of £60,000 in all. The Prime Minister stated that his proposals were on the lines suggested by Tyrone Guthrie. These include a sum of money for scholarships for Australian actors and theatre technicians,

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<sup>60</sup> O'Connor, p. 124.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Cushing, *The Complete Memoirs* (Cambridge: Signum Books, 2013), p. 141.

<sup>62</sup> Forsyth, pp. 200-01.

etc. to study overseas, and a fund to assist in bringing first-rate productions to Australia.<sup>63</sup>

Despite growing Australian interest in the future direction of its national culture under British guidance, the report played heavily upon the cultural cringe and deliberately exploited the pervading sense of Australia's limitations and cultural inferiority to Britain.<sup>64</sup> The predominance of this official strategy had been in evidence throughout the Old Vic tour, as it always aimed at making Australians 'realise the appalling condition of [their] theatre and the opportunity they have to remedy it'. Australian theatre practitioners and their publics were reminded how their cultural landscape was 'de-professionalised', 'smack[ing] of the amateur in the worst sense', and characterised by 'appallingly low' standards in comparison to Britain.<sup>65</sup> As a solution to these prescribed inadequacies, Guthrie suggested an import-export scheme with the regular 'import of a planned series of theatrical productions of the very first class' from Britain over the next three years, and Australian export of its best talent through scholarship schemes funded by the Australian government to newly establishing English Theatre schools such as the Old Vic's in London. The best of these repatriated graduates would go on to form their own company, and by performing and winning the approval of 'sophisticated' London audiences would eventually be seen as fit to return to Australia and complete the cycle.<sup>66</sup> It was a clarification of a process the Old Vic had already begun during its Commonwealth Tour in fact, and a vision for the perpetual cultural exploitation of Australia. Guthrie's outline drew protest and disagreement from Australia's strongest regional theatres in Sydney and Melbourne, though ultimately the proposal fell victim to

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<sup>63</sup> BW 12/4, 'Report on British Council Activities in Australia, January to September 1949', p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Tyrone Guthrie, 'Report on Australian Theatre', *The Australian Quarterly*, 21.2 (1949), 78-83. On the cultural cringe see, Phillips, *The Australian Tradition*; Alomes, pp. 4-11, pp. 19-23.

<sup>65</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, 'January to August 1948', p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Alomes, p. 22.

national politics and was quietly scrapped following Ben Chifley's electoral defeat to Robert Menzies in December 1949.<sup>67</sup>

In a similar attitude to that displayed in Egypt, the British Council seemed astonishingly dismissive and indifferent to Australia's burgeoning post-war theatre scene at the time. Recognition that Australia's 'Little Theatres' were artistically rich and active can only be traced in archival accounts after the failure of Guthrie's scheme. By the mid-1950s it was acknowledged that in Sydney and Melbourne it was:

possible to see the works of modern authors such as Eliot, Fry, Rattigan, Morgan and Ustinov and classics such as Shaw and Sheridan. Productions often reach a high amateur standard.<sup>68</sup>

It was even admitted that Little Theatre standards were 'very often higher than that in the professional theatre'.<sup>69</sup> The notion that amateur actors were performing side-by-side with radio professionals provided some comfort to British cultural administrators, because at the time no native accents were heard on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) airwaves.<sup>70</sup> This suppression of local accents was a crucial issue for Australian actors in the 1950s with the linguist A. G. Mitchell suggesting that the country had become 'the only Anglo-Saxon community which was ashamed of having its own way of pronouncing the English language'.<sup>71</sup>

In terms of Australia's Shakespearian culture, there were in fact some positive consequences to the Old Vic and Shakespeare Memorial Theatre tours, though not the kind that aided Britain. As in Egypt, the resurgence in local Shakespeare productions threatened to undermine British claims of exclusive Shakespeare ownership. The most

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<sup>67</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, 'October 1949 to September 1950'.

<sup>68</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 12/6 Australia: Annual Reports 1947-1958, 'Representative's Annual Report for 1952/53', p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> TNA: BW 12/6, 'Representative's Annual Report for 1951-1952'.

<sup>70</sup> Although the ABC Play Unit did provide an essential outlet for Australian acting talent, it also restricted local accents in broadcasting well into the 1960s. TNA: BW 12/6, 'Representative's Annual Report for 1951-1952'. On Ray Lawler's *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955) and the profound cultural impact that naturalistic playwriting had in allowing Australian actors to use their own accents on stage, see Zoe Caldwell, *I Will Be Cleopatra: An Actress' Journey* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), pp. 66-67.

<sup>71</sup> Phillips, *The Australian Tradition*, p. 92.

prominent example of this was John Alden's Australian Shakespeare Company that undertook an enormous national tour between 1951 and 1952.<sup>72</sup> Following considerable success in Sydney and Melbourne, the John Alden Company moved on to Perth where it 'broke all records for a Shakespearian season in Western Australia' before finally covering Brisbane, Launceston, Hobart, and Canberra.<sup>73</sup> Despite managing to establish an incredibly widespread and popular following for Shakespeare, the British Council Representative made the snuffy observation that Alden:

suffers from some of the faults associated with the old actor-manager touring regimes in the UK some years ago. He is sometimes spoken of as Australia's Donald Wolfit, but he has neither Wolfit's stature as an actor, nor (fortunately) some of the faults attributed to Wolfit himself.<sup>74</sup>

The comparison with Wolfit reveals the organisation's unease at the notion of a truly popular or nativist Shakespeare in Australia or anywhere else, possibly because such a phenomenon would be outside of their direct control and influence. It is a reminder of their post-war strategy of utilising and disseminating Shakespeare strategically and for other interests. Despite the decisive post-war shift towards more democratic notions of mass appeal, the Shakespeare that the British Council promoted was still metropolitan, elitist, and heavily freighted with notions of English exceptionalism. It chiefly provided cultural cover and assistance for very specific economic, political, and security concerns, such as strengthening Commonwealth ties in order to gain better and exclusive access to markets, and countering Communist influence and infiltration within a key part of Britain's world system.

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<sup>72</sup> Before the war, Alden played repertory theatre with Wolfit and minor parts for the Old Vic in London. Immediately following it, he performed garrison theatres in Japan. His 1948 *Measure for Measure* and 1950 *King Lear* at the Independent Theatre Sydney were both critical and commercial successes. John Rickard. 'John Alden (1908-1962)', *The Australian Dictionary of Biography Online* <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/alden-john-9323>> [Accessed 13 November 2015].

<sup>73</sup> This 1951-1952 tour received modest Commonwealth support as a Jubilee event. The head of the ABC at the time, Sir Charles Moses, heralded the tour as 'the beginning of a true National Theatre' though negotiations for an annual Commonwealth grant failed due to Alden's refusal to relinquish control over his company. See Rickard.

<sup>74</sup> TNA: BW 12/6, 'Representative's Annual Report for 1952/53', p. 9.

There were clear signs of interest in an Australian Shakespeare when claimed and interpreted by Australians themselves and, indicative of the changing times, the John Alden Company's embrace of Australian accents contributed much to their popular success. By the mid 1950s, any hoped for top-down dissemination of British classical culture by local anglophile elites failed to materialise. The shift in the cultural landscape that saw Australians voicing their own accent on stage, screen, and radio, not only challenged the traditional hierarchical relationship of imperial-colonial relations, but mirrored transitions within the internal margins of Britain itself. There too, changes were taking place in metropolitan-provincial relationships.<sup>75</sup>

### **New Elizabethanism and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre**

Despite the failure to establish an Australian National Theatre, Britain's re-colonisation of Australia's theatrical culture continued through further tours by the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1949 and 1953. Following the successful box office returns of the Old Vic's 1948 tour, the Australian theatre manager J. C. Williamsons was persuaded to book the SMT for a 1949 tour of *Macbeth* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.<sup>76</sup> Although the SMT encountered a disappointing response in its opening week in Melbourne, bookings gradually picked up in Sydney once 'the excellence of the Company's performances became generally recognised', though the final Brisbane and Adelaide seasons also disappointed expectations.<sup>77</sup> Although Britain's Shakespeare exports were encouraged, embraced, and supported by Australia's settler elites, they failed to secure extensive

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<sup>75</sup> Alomes, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> The 1949 touring production of *Much Ado About Nothing* was directed by John Gielgud. Both it and *Macbeth* starred Anthony Quayle and Diana Wynyard. Penny Gay, 'International Glamour or Home Grown Entertainment? 1948-1964', in *O Brave New World: Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage*, ed. by John Golder and Richard Madelaine (Sydney: Currency Press, 2001), pp. 180-99 (p. 182).

<sup>77</sup> Geoffrey Milne, *Theatre Australia (Un)Limited: Australian Theatre Since the 1950s* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2004), p. 80.

appeal amongst the majority of working-class people. As one British Council administrator lamented:

Among the discriminating the tour created a tremendous impression, but the general public is still more responsive to well known screen names than to well acted Shakespeare.<sup>78</sup>

Despite failing to drum up anywhere near the levels of press excitement that supported the Old Vic's celebrity-garlanded venture, the tour proved to be a real financial boon for Quayle's regional company. The much-needed foreign revenues it accrued were invested straight back into the reconstruction of the SMT's main theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in time for the Festival of Britain season.<sup>79</sup> Unsurprisingly then, by the end of the 1949 run Quayle was already promising another visit in 1953.<sup>80</sup> This second tour played *As You Like It*, *Henry IV Part I*, and *Othello*, and attempted to generate popular appeal by associating itself with Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation. To the Australian popular imagination, it was presented as a cultural advance party for the Royal Commonwealth Tour of 1954.<sup>81</sup>

By projecting itself into the Commonwealth's global 'provinces', a regional theatre like the SMT was able to challenge the London based Old Vic's candidacy for English National Theatre. Stratford-upon-Avon's claim to being Shakespeare's birthplace was a useful affirmation for exploiting a growing nativist trend that sought to locate 'authentic' national identity somewhere in the heart of England. In Robert Hewison's term this mythical 'Deep England' was based on an 'image of the national heartland' that was:

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<sup>78</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, 'General Report on Activities for six months ending March 1950', p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: The Peter Hall Years* (London: William Kember, 1974), p. 12. During his tenure Quayle took the company on six tours, performing eleven productions in total: Australia in 1949-50, West Germany in 1950, New Zealand and Australia in 1953, Continental Europe in 1953-54, 1955 and 1957, and the USSR in 1958. Addenbrooke, p. 283.

<sup>80</sup> TNA: BW 12/4, 'October 1949 to September 1950'.

<sup>81</sup> The 1953 tour included three Australian expatriates (Leo McKern, Jane Holland, and Keith Mitchell), who had each won a scholarship to study at the Old Vic following auditions for Olivier during his Commonwealth Tour. The 1953 SMT tour was a longer thirty-seven weeks and included New Zealand. Gay, p. 182.

constructed as much out of folk memories, poetry and cultural associations as actuality [...] This imagined pastoral landscape served as contrast to, and compensation for, all the destruction and stress of war. Somewhere among its bright fields and bosky shades nestled the nation's soul.<sup>82</sup>

This notion of a de-centred Britishness, one that could be located on both regional and global peripherals, linked the Greater-British project with Quayle's own vision for his ambitious Stratford theatre. Shakespeare became a useful symbolic component in an establishment attempt at defining a globally dispersed Britishness for the post-war era. As his autobiography asserts, Quayle's scheme was as consciously political as it was creative:

With one big effort, the SMT – a well-thought of, well respected, but always slightly provincial theatre – could be turned into the foremost English theatre. And if it became such a centre, then it would become the theatrical centre for all English-speaking peoples. It would be an artistic achievement, and a political one – it would help bond the nations together.<sup>83</sup>

*The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre 1948-1950: A Photographic Record* (1951), the first bi-annual souvenir book that the SMT issued in an era before the use of individual theatre programmes, articulates the links being established between Cold War politics, postcolonial concerns, and Britain's Shakespeare industry.<sup>84</sup> Quayle's ideas were grounded in the broader ideals of New Elizabethanism, a conservative current of thought that sought to arrest and reverse many of Labour's post-war achievements. It followed in the wake of Churchill's return to power in October 1951 on an electoral promise of arresting Britain's 'slide into a shoddy and slushy Socialism' by instigating the

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<sup>82</sup> Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London: Methuen, 1995), p. 23. See also, Angus Calder *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), pp. 180-208; Patrick Wright *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 77-83.

<sup>83</sup> Quayle, pp. 318-19.

<sup>84</sup> These early annual souvenir programmes featured Angus Bean's production photographs, local advertisements, personnel biographies, and short articles. This edition features Ivor Brown's forward, 'Stratford from Without' and Quayle's main article 'The Theatre from Within'.



‘march to the third British Empire’ through increased partnership between the UK and its white-settler Dominions.<sup>85</sup> New Elizabethanism was a mostly discursive reactionary political trend against the Labour Party’s Welfare State programme and its drive to build a more centrally planned ‘New Britain’ upon the popular consensus for change it inherited immediately following the war. It also sought to interpret the anticipated Coronation of Elizabeth II as a sign of Britain’s continued ability to not only weather the crisis of post-war imperial retrenchment, but to also locate within its history the latent resources needed to reawaken national greatness and reverse any drift towards post-war decline. Shakespeare constituted important cultural territory that needed to be claimed and mobilised for the promotion of such a worldview.

Stratford-upon-Avon provided exemplary ground for enacting New Elizabethan ideals, as can be seen in the rhetorical performance of Ivor Brown’s essay ‘The Theatre from Without’. Brown insisted that Shakespeare ‘the man’ and Stratford ‘the *milieu*’ must be appreciated together because ‘Shakespeare was a Stratfordian, our ‘loving countryman’. His pen portrait of ‘a paradisiacal reach of river [...] the workaday bucolic Stratford with its fairs and races and sales of farmers’ stock’ that is ‘always tweedy and leathery at the core’ served to establish a bridge between historical visions and the present day. Brown even went so far as to assert that:

the flash of jockey’s silk and the gleam of horses groomed in pride make an exquisite spectacle that Shakespeare would have relished especially on a sun-drenched October afternoon.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> In Heather Wiebe, *Britten’s Unquiet Past: Sound and Memory in Post-war Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 364. John Darwin, ‘A Third British Empire? The Dominion Idea in Imperial Politics’, in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century*, ed. by Judith Brown and Wm Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 64-87.

<sup>86</sup> Brown and Quayle, p. 2.

Framing any playgoer's Stratford visit as a living encounter with deep England, such a vision provided an idealistic social and political context for those who wished to 'return to Stratford for the evening play [...] enriched'.<sup>87</sup>

Quayle's proceeding essay 'The Theatre from Within' placed Stratford in a more global context:

They come from all over the world – from America, Australia, France, Finland, Nigeria and New Guinea; in Stratford's streets, those unescapably English streets where the 'Tudor Tea Shoppe' nestles [...] drawn by the genius that overlaps seas and frontiers.

The acknowledgement of increased tourism into the heart of England acts less as a celebration of international exchange or migration, and more as a motivating backdrop that serves to bring Quayle's nativist vision into sharper relief.<sup>88</sup> After claiming that nine-tenths of the 'well over a million' people attempting to get tickets for the SMT in 1950 were 'Englishmen', Quayle asks 'Why? What is the reason for the English aspect of this phenomenon?'<sup>89</sup> He goes on to answer that:

Shakespeare wrote at a time of great national danger, and at a time when the English tongue and the English spirit were together bursting into greatness. Those conditions, working on his genius, made of his writing the very stuff that lies at the heart of every Englishman [...] Shakespeare is more than the national poet; he is the very voice of England. And it is to hear that voice, now, in a time of need and testing, at a time when the country's danger has never been so great, that Englishmen come to Stratford. They may be unconscious of it, but I believe that is the reason.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Brown and Quayle, p. 8. Many prominent left-wing English intellectuals were also swept up by the wartime resurgence of what Raymond Williams termed 'social patriotism'. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 391. See for example, George Orwell's 'The Lion and the Unicorn', in *George Orwell: Essays*, ed. by Bernard Crick (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2000), pp. 138-88.

<sup>88</sup> For Stratford and Shakespeare tourism, see Katherine West Scheil, 'Ann Hathaway's Cottage: Myth, Tourism, Diplomacy', in *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory*, ed. by Clara Calvo and Coppelia Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 330-59.

<sup>89</sup> Brown and Quayle, p. 9.

<sup>90</sup> Brown and Quayle, p. 11.

That the exact dangers that unconsciously draw English-speaking visitors to hear ‘the very voice of England’ are left intentionally vague is not surprising, as the association of socialism with nebulous internal and external threats during the early Cold War period was a key New Elizabethan trope. A. L. Rowse, a key contributor to this school of thought, constructed his polemic against an incredibly broad range of perceived left-wing advisories that went well beyond orthodox party politics, even mobilising Shakespeare against academia:<sup>91</sup>

Criticism, as an end in itself, is antithetical to creation [...] Creation grows in the dark of the unconscious, in the warm dark of the intuitive. (Was there ever a more apposite instance than Shakespeare, the ‘child of nature’, as against the academics and the intellectuals?).<sup>92</sup>

As well as playing to party politics and international concerns, New Elizabethanism clearly aligned itself with conservative traditions of literary criticism that sensed their grip on Shakespeare to be slipping.<sup>93</sup>

Quayle ingeniously sidesteps his theatre’s long association with touristic bardolatry by ascribing that kind of thing to foreign visitors. ‘Englishmen’ however, came ‘in a time of need and testing’ to hear ‘the very voice of England’.<sup>94</sup> Underlining the degree to which such bombast required a pervasive atmosphere of Cold War anxiety in order to thrive, he reminds his readers that ‘two great wars have been fought, and painfully won’ but that:

a third, even greater war, looms ahead [...] As he looks to the future [...] the Englishman needs to be in touch with his country’s past; he needs to remind himself of the things he

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<sup>91</sup> See also Philip Gibbs, *The New Elizabethans* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1953).

<sup>92</sup> A. L. Rowse, *An Elizabethan Garland* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 154.

<sup>93</sup> See the introduction to the third edition of Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Running the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre between the wars, Bridge-Adams strove hard to define the theatre away from the burgeoning Shakespeare tourist industry surrounding it. The prestige of undertaking international touring in service to national diplomacy may well have helped in defining the theatre’s sense of cultural and artistic pre-eminence. For how this growth in Shakespeareana impacted the spread of the place name ‘Stratford’ from America to New Zealand, see Katherine Scheil, ‘Importing Stratford’, in *Critical Survey*, 24.2 (2012), 71-87.

holds dear, of the kind of men from whom he is sprung. So he turns to the magic of Shakespeare's words.<sup>95</sup>

Such grandiloquence only came into some kind of empirical focus with details of the SMT's recent touring engagements and its overt ambition to foster Greater-British ties across the Anglo-sphere.<sup>96</sup> He informed theatregoers that the 1949 Australia tour's 'real success':

lay in the linking of the Elizabethan age to our own [...] plans for the future include a return visit to Australia (but a return which next time must embrace New Zealand, and, if possible, Canada and South Africa) and a tour of the United States.<sup>97</sup>

The extent to which the SMT had become deeply involved in the burgeoning cultural Cold War of the 1950s is suggested in Quayle's comments on a second European tour, when:

the season of 1950 ended with a short, but triumphant, tour of Germany. The theatres were packed and the German critics highly enthusiastic. To the glum, ludicrous, tragical struggle, the doleful rivalry of East and West which ferments in the ruins of the Reich, the visit of the Stratford Company – though perhaps not worth a division – has certainly made a contribution.<sup>98</sup>

Emboldened perhaps by the SMT's part in celebrating the end of the Berlin blockade, Quayle concludes in grand imperial style, inviting kith and kin to gather round the figure of Shakespeare:

The final achievement of the Elizabethan Age, its most enduring monument [...] is the English expansion overseas, the fact that North America is inhabited by English-speaking stock. What could be of more immediate impact upon every Englishman and woman alive today than this achievement of our forefathers, for to it we owe our very survival over the course of one generation?<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Brown and Quayle, p. 11.

<sup>96</sup> Belich suggests that nineteenth-century patterns of shared industrial growth and identity across Britain's white-settler Empire and the US led to the creation of a recognisable 'Anglo-world' or Anglo-sphere. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>97</sup> Brown and Quayle, p. 15.

<sup>98</sup> Brown and Quayle, p. 15.

<sup>99</sup> Rowse, p. 160-61.

As the ticket sales from the Australian tours clearly indicated, beyond such political posturing there were very real commercial incentives for touring. From the very beginning of his tenure as Artistic Director in 1948, Quayle insisted that the SMT's aims be as much 'foreign as domestic' despite the Governors' fear that it:

might bring disaster to their good old chug-along theatre [...] with two directors, I argued, we could form two companies. I would take one of them away for a year and try to earn some much needed money.<sup>100</sup>

Quayle sought the theatre's success and survival against stiff metropolitan competition and also the maintenance of its independence from Arts Council funding.<sup>101</sup> Quayle's 'innate conservatism and distrust of state aid' led him to look abroad in order to not be subject to the 'outside influences and bureaucracy' attendant on grants.<sup>102</sup> Despite this conservative affectation, the SMT's arrangements with arms-length cultural bodies such as the British Council shows a deep, though informal, intertwining of state-private interests that ensured access to alternative streams of potential revenue overseas.

From the outset then, Australia was economically vital for Quayle's artistic ambitions, irrespective of the enabling political rhetoric used to promote his theatre's embrace of cultural diplomacy. On a practical level, the experience of overseas touring fed back into the SMT's stage practice more broadly. Just as big-screen names had proved essential to attracting mass audiences to Shakespeare in Australia, Quayle understood that similar practices were also required for growing his provincial English theatre. By the time he resigned his directorship in 1958 the SMT was widely believed to have taken 'the crown for Shakespearian production from the Old Vic' thanks largely to

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<sup>100</sup> Quayle, p. 321.

<sup>101</sup> Quayle had been appointed Artistic Director in 1948 and was quick to consolidate and expand upon the institutional changes brought about by the short tenures of his two predecessors. Robert Atkins (1944-45) and Barry Jackson (1945-48) had managed to consolidate overall control of the theatre into the hands of a single Artistic Director. Sally Beaman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History of Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 193-95.

<sup>102</sup> Beaman, p. 200.

‘a string of performances there by Old Vic alumni’.<sup>103</sup> It should be noted how many of these alumni had experience touring Shakespeare abroad with the Old Vic before the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre grew increasingly into the role as go-to Shakespeare company for cultural-diplomatic theatre touring during the 1950s.

### **New Britishness and the Festival of Britain**

Before considering how ‘returning’ Australian talent influenced cultural production upon the British stage itself, we need to take account of the countervailing currents of left-wing establishment thought at the time. With Commonwealth migration to the metropolitan centre increasing at the same time as Britain’s global status was in decline, the Labour Party sought to mitigate domestic concerns by formulating its own ethno-cultural vision of Britishness. The Labour-administered Festival of Britain of 1951 was instrumental in embedding such a notion of national identity and the sense that Britain constituted an integral, insular, and bounded space separate from the consequences of its imperial history and entanglements.<sup>104</sup> This was achieved by domestically deploying the kinds of ethnographic ideas and practices that had historically been applied to the peripheries of Empire itself.

The Festival of Britain provided a portrait of a stable and progressive country that was being newly minted for the post-war era, confident that its arts and technology would help it successfully navigate the challenges that lay ahead.<sup>105</sup> As the festival set out to explain Britain’s post-war identity to itself, it found it expedient to all but ignore the existence of its extensive global Empire. As Becky Conekin puts it, Empire was ‘the

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<sup>103</sup> Chambers, p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> For a recent discussion on the commemorative qualities of the SMT’s 1951 Festival of Britain season, see Graham Holderness, ‘Remembrances of Things Past: Shakespeare 1851, 1951, 2012’, in *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory*, ed. by Clara Calvo and Coppelia Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 78-100.

<sup>105</sup> Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre Since The War* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 52.

place that was almost absent' from the Festival of Britain despite the pervasive atmosphere of national edification and introspection.<sup>106</sup> Festival guides and brochures posed questions such as, 'But who are these British people?' and 'What differing breeds of ancestors have contributed to the shaping of such a rare miscellany of faces as confronts the visitor in any London bus?' Although the issue of British identity was frequently raised in terms of race and appearance, the answers made no reference to recent patterns of African, Caribbean, and Asian Commonwealth migration.<sup>107</sup> Rather, by evoking pre and early European history a 'deep' or 'foundational' temporal portrait was constructed that allowed the Festival's 'People of Britain' section to completely erase recent trends and disavow the changes taking place within Britain at the time.

New Elizabethanism and New Britishness can be viewed as competing strategies for managing domestic perceptions of imperial retrenchment and increasing non-white Commonwealth migration into the UK. In needing to promote Britain's Third Empire of closer white-settler Dominion relations, each sought to establish a newfound Greater-British national identity linked to the English language, and pre-historical notions of ethnic whiteness. While sanctioning immigration anxiety with such racial myths, Greater-Britishness also offered British citizens the promise of continued global power and influence. From a Cold War and geopolitical standpoint, the promotion of a Third British Empire would also help scupper America's notion that Britain's future lay in its absorption into a greater European project. The United States was promoting such a vision at the time as a viable post-war settlement, and as a Cold War strategy for

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<sup>106</sup> Becky E. Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 183.

<sup>107</sup> See for example, Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 111-30; Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Harper Collins, 2009); James Proctor, "1948'/1998' Periodising Post-war Black Britain", in *Writing Black Britain 1948-1998*, ed. by James Proctor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1-16.

accelerating the rehabilitation of Germany in order to counter and contain the Soviet Union's westward advance.<sup>108</sup>

New Britishness and New Elizabethanism can be understood as the final stages of Britain's long anthropological turn that had started with the onset of imperial decline around the turn of the twentieth century. James Buzard describes metropolitan auto-ethnography as a process in which 'modern Western societies seek to know themselves as 'cultures'' and as 'self sufficient entities possessing their own indigenous systems of meaning, essentially independent of their increasingly undeniable dependence on 'the rest''.<sup>109</sup> The way in which imperial retrenchment disrupted modernist cosmopolitan ideals and spurred a need to establish new national narratives of identity and belonging is discussed further in Jed Esty's *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (2003). Esty states that although imperial decline and international crises made:

national representation seem politically urgent [...] the anthropological turn [...] made national self-representation seem conceptually *possible* [...] Imperial retrenchment thus yielded aesthetic solutions to the problem of England's social unknowability and its high/low cultural schism.<sup>110</sup>

The anthropological turn sought to re-inscribe Britain's national culture as total, integral, and authentic, and the Festival of Britain can be seen as a high watermark in such late-modernist applications. By the early 1950s, Shakespeare was being promoted as a symbol for the global and historical spread of the English language and associated with white ethnic notions of kith and kin across the Anglo-sphere.<sup>111</sup> Shakespeare was integral for the Greater-British project's cultural front, as it attempted to refashion Britain's beleaguered world system for the post-war era. Such usage had a notably elitist and class-

<sup>108</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, 'OSS, CIA and European Unity: The American committee of United Europe, 1948-60', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 8.1 (1997), 184-227.

<sup>109</sup> James Buzard, 'Ethnography as Interruption: *News From Nowhere*, Narrative, and the Modern Romance of Authority', *Victorian Studies*, 40.3 (1997), 445-74 (p. 450).

<sup>110</sup> Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>111</sup> For the United States' experience of British cultural-diplomatic tactics similar to those employed in Australia and New Zealand, see M. G. Aune, 'Importing Shakespeare: Tyrone Guthrie and British Cold War Cultural Colonialism', in *Shakespeare*, 5.4 (2009), 423-40.



cultural dynamic as well. Rather than being merely exploitative, Dominion white-settler elites could continue to be co-beneficiaries in the global exploitation of the Dominion's working classes, be it black working classes in South Africa, or predominantly white labour in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. However, although Shakespeare's many reinventions over time confirmed its facility for supporting a variety of ideological causes; ambivalence, slippage, and the subversion of meaning occurs whenever the texts are produced upon the stage, even in Stratford-upon-Avon.<sup>112</sup>

### **Loudon Sainthill at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre: *The Tempest* (1951 and 1952)**

In order to establish how the Greater-British project's contradictions were evident on a theatrical level we can turn to the work of Loudon Sainthill, an influential Australian theatre designer active in shaping Shakespeare productions at the SMT in the early 1950s.<sup>113</sup> Sainthill, a Royalist member of Australia's former white-settler cultural elite, had illustrated the commemorative book that accompanied the Old Vic tour of 1948 prompting Olivier to help him find work in Britain.<sup>114</sup> His first commission was to design Michael Benthall's masque-inspired production of *The Tempest* during the SMT's Festival of Britain Season. The production enjoyed two runs, from 26 June 1951, with Michael Redgrave as Prospero, Alan Badel as Ariel, and Hugh Griffiths as Caliban; and from 25 March 1952, with Sir Ralph Richardson, Margaret Leighton, and Michael Hordern in the same leading roles.

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<sup>112</sup> Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, pp. liv-lv.

<sup>113</sup> Andrew Montana, *Fantasy Modern: Loudon Sainthill's Theatre of Art and Life* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2013). The notion of imperial cultural traffic's multi-directionality is also explored by Australian academics in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>114</sup> Alomes, p. 33. Throughout his career in England, Sainthill illustrated a range of published works celebrating British Royalty and the political establishment. See, Harry Tatlock Miller, ed., *Royal Album* (London: Hutchinson, 1951); Harry Tatlock Miller and Loudon Sainthill, *Undoubted Queen* (London: Hutchinson, 1958); Harry Tatlock Miller and Loudon Sainthill, *Churchill: The Walk with Destiny* (London: Hutchinson, 1959).

Sainthill's fantastic design scheme was such a popular and critical success that it occupied many column inches and quickly established his reputation in Britain.<sup>115</sup> In many commentaries the characteristic exoticism of Sainthill's set and costumes were overtly framed as 'antipodean'. Many reporters felt compelled to either criticise or celebrate the way in which this recently disembarked Australian artist brought colour to an austerity-era Britain still used to rationing. Although weighty design concepts and directorial visions were commonly criticised as distractions from Shakespeare's language at the time, the *Warwick Advertiser* found Sainthill's production to be 'a remarkable essay in imaginative presentation', with the:

use of flash powder and smoke rather in the tradition of pantomime [...] a world of fantasy, at times of nightmare quality, at times of surprising beauty [...] The players had an almost dreamlike inconsequence as they performed [...] the ship [was] tossed on an eerie sea of living water, as nymphs waved their arms in unison to distant music [...] a production that bristles with ingenuity'.<sup>116</sup>

The visual strength of the production emboldened its theatricality, though it also led to a pervading sense of uncertainty on how to 'read' or respond to it. The main reason for this was the ambiguous effect of Sainthill's complex visual style. Bryan Robertson states that 'in the theatre Sainthill was unquestionably an artist more than a mere designer [...] who chose to work through the medium of the stage'.<sup>117</sup> Often his artwork was compared with the style of the Renaissance painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-93), whose bizarre and surreal works were rediscovered in the early twentieth century by the continental Surrealists and subsequently impacted upon British artists during the

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<sup>115</sup> Sally O'Neill, 'Sainthill, Loudon (1918–1969)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sainthill-loudon-11602>> [Accessed 22 May 2013].

<sup>116</sup> Anon, 'Fantasy Holds the Stage at Stratford', *Warwick Advertiser*, 29 June 1951.

<sup>117</sup> Bryan Robertson, 'Loudon Sainthill: An Appreciation', in *Loudon Sainthill*, ed. by Harry Tatlock Miller (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 11.

1940s.<sup>118</sup> This Neo-Romantic movement became the primary visual arts manifestation of Britain's anthropological turn, expressing a strand of nativist mysticism in concert with the country's sense of wartime isolation.<sup>119</sup>

As the 'Arcimboldo Effect' was synonymous with a visual language loaded with double meaning, Sainthill's costumes and set designs suggested historical and classical allegory whilst also inviting the creation of something new and contemporary. They were able to accommodate both residual and emergent modes of representation. Stage backdrops throughout, and tableaux scenes especially, show that although the Baroque Mannerist style signposted an aesthetic tradition associated with the play's original Jacobean moment (especially its relation to court masques) it also contained incongruous exotic elements like desert plains, tropical rainforest, and poisonous or carnivorous plants (Figure 1). With his signature motif of menacing and 'luxuriant foliage' Sainthill visited upon English audiences Australians' sense of alienation from their own local fauna.<sup>120</sup> This was a much commented upon phenomenon at the time. As the novelist Shirley Hazzard stated, 1940s schooling 'had placed Australia in perpetual, flagrant violation of reality' especially towards its own landscape, with school botany books exclaiming 'come down to Kew in lilac time (it isn't far from London!)'.<sup>121</sup>

Sainthill's surrealism not only twisted the intensely subjective gaze of British native mysticism onto colonial landscapes, it projected it onto its marginal inhabitants as well. This can be seen in the production's ever-present tableaux of supporting figures (Figure 2 and Figure 3). As one reviewer noted:

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<sup>118</sup> The most famous British exponents of mid twentieth century British Neo-Romanticism were Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland, and John Piper. Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their Times* (London: Tauris Parke, 2010). For a longer historical perspective stretching back to the English Romantics see, Peter Woodcock, *This Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries* (London: Gothic Image, 2000).

<sup>119</sup> According to Hewison, this British take on surrealism transfigured the 'irrational' into the 'magical' and accommodated the rediscovery of 'landscape and figure as subjects for imaginative transformation'. Hewison, p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> Robertson, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> Susan Hazzard, *The Transit of Venus* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 31-32; Alomes, p. 8.

The isle was full of other things than noises. The very trees and rocks seemed to be alive, and the shipwrecked nobles must have wondered into what sort of nightmare they had stumbled.<sup>122</sup>

Besides their clear association with sexuality, exoticism, and anthropomorphism, what is most compelling about this silent retinue of Apes, Sea Nymphs, and Monsters is the tension between their vivid appearance and conventional ‘invisibility’ upon the stage.<sup>123</sup> By theatrical custom, the supporting player’s relegation to the bottom of the cast list would inform audiences to only acknowledge them incidentally if at all. Upon the stage however, they are still very much ‘there’ functioning as a living bridge between Prospero and the island setting out of which they frequently emerge, blend, and disappear. As a tangible link between the island and Prospero’s agency upon it, these strange groupings evoke a disconcerting tension between nineteenth-century modes of staging and more ambiguous 1950s modes of orientalist representation. The more playful and post-modern inscriptions found in Sainthill’s post-war exotic imagery disrupted long-established stage conventions, with many reviewers noting how the supporting players managed to permeate the entire production, invading both the stage foreground and the audience’s consciousness:

the seaward prospect suggests, not to my mind with felicity, that it forms part of an archipelago of anthills in a strange, haunted place, magical in its own right, bathed in the pearly, humid haze familiar to tropical explorers. Small, quizzical prickly monsters dwell in the interstices of its foreshore, and the breakers, which drive the ship onto the rocks, are seen to be composed of well-disciplined sprites and nymphs [...] The accent (as people say nowadays) is on magic: the natural magic of the isle which lives in it before Prospero came there, and the

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<sup>122</sup> Anon, ‘Nightmare Isle’, *Western Independent*, 8 July 1951.

<sup>123</sup> The original performance programme lists two groups of supporting players. The ‘Water Nymphs’ were placed within the main cast list and consisted of nine actresses. ‘Shapes attending on Prospero’ were relegated to a separate footnote away from the entire cast and consisted of eight male actors. The original Wardrobe Plot breaks this subgroup down further into Sea Hedgehogs, Sea Monsters, Barnacles and Apes. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT): RSC/DE/1/1952/TEM1 ‘Original costume designs for the production of *The Tempest* performed at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1952’.

(as it were) post-occupational magic which Prospero's learning has evolved.<sup>124</sup>

Such reviews suggest that Sainthill's set teased out anxious memories of actual 'tropical' climes that seemed similarly perilous. As Prospero's 'post-occupational magic' is 'evolved' from the island's 'natural magic' and so constitutive upon the island itself, Sainthill's design encouraged contemplation on how Britain's own domestic status had been constructed upon such distant and transient imperial holdings.

Fleming's piece effectively encapsulates how Sainthill's production design conceptually framed the performers within it. It shaped their interpretation and accounted for the varied performances given by the numerous actors operating within it across the two seasons. Even the SMT's 'star' actors playing parts freighted with long performance conventions were encouraged to discover something new in order to acclimatise their characterisations to Sainthill's complex visual grammar. This is most clearly evident when comparing the two separate production runs. In 1951 Benthall's staging accommodated a 'mythical' vision of the past imbued with typical Neo-Romantic symbols of English heritage and native mysticism. In this mode, Alan Badel's classical and 'statuesque' Ariel worked well alongside Michael Redgrave's 'prophetic' portrayal of Prospero (Figure. 4). Both characterisations invited comparison with a multitude of visual and literary inter-texts that belonged firmly within the internalised heritage dreamscape that typified Britain's Neo-Romantic movement. Identifying such layers of reference, some reviewers drew comparison with the lithographic drawings of William Blake:

Mr Alan Badel [gave] a performance of flawless beauty in which every Blake-like pose imprisoned the rare spiritual quality of the creature.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Peter Fleming, 'Theatre', *The Spectator*, 29 June 1951.

<sup>125</sup> Anon, 'The Tempest', *The Times*, 27 June 1951.

Others witnessed a Greek influence:

an elemental spirit robbed of freedom and even tortured by  
the loss [...] who can flash like a winged messenger from a  
Blake prophetic drawing or remain poised and silent like a  
Greek garden god as he watches.<sup>126</sup>

While some preferred to call upon the Italian heritage of Roman and Renaissance  
imagery:

Gone was the traditional fairy-like figure and, in its place, a  
rather terrifying unearthly sprite, reminiscent of Mercury [...] his voice and every gesture creating brilliantly an impression  
of other worldliness [...] a Donatello figure, given radiant life,  
quivered through the island air.<sup>127</sup>

The second production in 1952 however, dissolved into the kinds of science  
fiction tropes that were to become mass cultural staples throughout the 1950s. The alien  
and exotic vegetation now seemed to resonate with the invasion anxieties that typified  
Cold War and anti-colonial concerns.<sup>128</sup> Margaret Leighton's Ariel in 1952 suggests this  
transformation from New Elizabethan to New British modes of representation. Her  
performance silhouette presented a protean and alien figure that signalled some uncertain  
technologically driven future (Figure. 5). *The Daily Telegraph* review acknowledged the  
shift toward futurism with its comment that an:

other-worldly atmosphere pervades that play [...] largely due  
to a remarkable performance of Ariel by Margaret Leighton  
who contrived to seem composed of another element than  
flesh and blood.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Anon, 'The Tempest at Stratford: Magic Exemplified at Stratford', *The Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1951.

<sup>127</sup> Anon, 'Island Story', *Observer*, 1 July 1951.

<sup>128</sup> The late 1940s and early 1950s witnessed the arrival of a plethora of 'alien invasion' narratives in a variety of cultural formats, from John Wyndham's novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) to Hollywood movies such as *The Thing from Another World* (1951). Such works reconfigured colonial and Cold War anxiety into the trope of invasion by exotic alien plant-life. See, Mark Jancovich and Derek Johnson, 'Film and Television, The 1950s', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 71-79 (71-4).

<sup>129</sup> W. A. Darlington, 'The Tempest' at Stratford: Magic by Michael Benthall', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 March 1952.

Many reviewers described Leighton's Ariel in anxious and ambivalent tones, as 'a slender salamander', or 'more demon than imp [...] masterful and baleful'.<sup>130</sup> Stephen Williams saw:

a spirit of no common sort, a weird, sexless, bat-like creature at whose cries men shudder and cover their faces against the darkness: something a little more than animal, a little less than human. Here is a potent enchantment indeed.<sup>131</sup>

Although Christine Dymkowski argues that for many reviewers 'an unwillingly enslaved female spirit must have appeared a contradiction in terms' the gender of Leighton's Ariel can also be read as a typical Cold War trope that conflated exotic and sexualised images of women as a means of mitigating technophobia (Figure. 6).<sup>132</sup> A prevalent societal fear over atomic technology was a common reaction to the era's contradictory scientific discourses that espoused both total annihilation and previously unimagined levels of material advancement and social ease. The latter was the kind of positive utilitarian view being propagated at the Festival of Britain at the time.<sup>133</sup>

Sainthill's Australian inflection on the English Neo-Romantic gaze also helped engender anti-imperialist readings.<sup>134</sup> The slightly incongruous appearance of apes in the largely underwater rock-pool aesthetics of the production functioned as a metonymic link to the Darwinian portrayal of Caliban's character over the previous eighty years, and

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<sup>130</sup> Alan Dent, 'Magician Lacks the Magic Touch', *News Chronicle*, 26 March 1952; P. L. Mannock, 'Margaret's Fairy is a Demon', *Daily Herald*, 26 March 1952.

<sup>131</sup> Stephen Williams, 'Enchanting Tempest', *Evening Standard*, 26 March 1952.

<sup>132</sup> Christine Dymkowski, *The Tempest in Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 44. Given the technological driven-ness of the era, gender played a central role in mitigating technophobia by associating it with both sexual conquest and spin-off household goods. 1952 would also see a huge spike in TV sales for the first major events in British television's broadcasting history, the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953). Timothy D. Taylor, *Strange Sounds: Music, Technology and Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), pp. 72-73. Exotica music, such as Harry Revel's *Music Out of the Moon* (1949), linked Cold War anxieties to vaguely positive notions of America's advancing sphere of influence in a booming mass consumption format. With its cover depiction of a woman stretched out on the moon, the music's rough approximations of Hawaiian, Indian, Middle Eastern, and Latin sounds formed a 'single musical sign system to which electronic instruments such as the Theremin were added to signify 'space''. Taylor *Strange Sounds*, p. 92.

<sup>133</sup> Leighton's striking costume and performance silhouette also chimes with the broader cultural context of Hollywood b-movies and other such popular, middle-brow cultural products of the era. Figure. 5 shows how Leighton's appearance seems to transform the backdrop into an alien or lunar landscape

<sup>134</sup> Addenbrooke, p. 15.

all that that performance history conveys (Figure 7). Following custom, previous Stratford performances such as Benson's famous portrayal from the early twentieth century were acknowledged:

Griffiths does not go for acrobatics, hanging by the teeth from a branch, as Frank Benson did [...] But his man-fish has a pathetic and moving appeal in its gesture and tone of voice.<sup>135</sup>

However, on Griffith's interpretation some reviewers saw more than the continuation of the pathos that so often accompanied the part from the early nineteenth-century onwards, identifying a more political bent that stressed Caliban's unjust treatment at the hands of Prospero:

Caliban was made more of man than monster by Hugh Griffiths in a performance that put the case of the slave with unusual poignancy: a Caliban more man than monster [...] the slave is rightly enabled to earn more of our pity.<sup>136</sup>

This shift of emphasis signals an important change in the part's critical reception, from its long historical function of sublimating colonial guilt into sympathy to the beginnings of a more penetrating political critique. Indeed other reviewers sensed and objected to the implications of this new accentuation, with Peter Fleming pointing out the 'dangerous' inference:

the monster should have the pathos and pretensions of a beast promoted to human status but Griffiths suggests only a man who has been degraded to a beast.<sup>137</sup>

Fleming's comments show resentment at the shift from a paternal, high-minded depiction of a colonial subject possessing pretensions towards full human status within the imperial family, towards a new vision that reconfigures the colonial subject's position as one of total degradation. Griffiths portrayal invited anti-colonial reading, by suggesting

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<sup>135</sup> Anon, 'The Tempest; A Triumph of Spectacle', *Scotsman*, 27 June 1951.

<sup>136</sup> Anon, 'The Tempest', *Birmingham Post*, 27 June 1951; Anon, 'The Tempest' Magic and Beauty', *Evesham Journal*, 8 July 1951.

<sup>137</sup> Fleming.



a human subject coerced into a monstrously subordinate position under Prospero's despotic rule.

It is noticeable that by the following year's re-staging, Caliban had become firmly associated with colonial oppression for many critics and reviewers. *The Observer's* commented that 'Michael Hordern is first rate, a most human and even poignant representation of the Backward and Under-privileged Peoples' (Figure 8 and Figure 9).<sup>138</sup> The *Birmingham Sunday Mercury's* statement that Caliban's grievance is 'effectively the puzzlement of the lower orders about their masters' suggests that at the time, views on class often braided with pro or anti-colonial opinions as well.<sup>139</sup> Hugh Philips' review for *The Daily Worker* provides an example of how left-wing political discussions in the early 1950s anticipated what would become established post-colonial readings of the part decades later. Philips' colonial concerns stem from a progressive, socialist, and anti-imperialist informed critique that viewed Caliban as a 'symbol of men', stating that 'there have been many millions like Caliban in the history of mankind'.<sup>140</sup> Emphasising the social and historical processes of slavery and colonisation, Philips lays a heavy stress on Caliban's deliberately neglectful nurturing by Prospero that is designed to 'allow only such knowledge as will enable them to be slaves' and concluding that Caliban is at 'the heart of the play for a modern audience' being 'in revolt against the magician who has taught him enough to make him into a slave but not enough to change his being'.<sup>141</sup> Philips' point interweaves international class struggle with legitimate claims for decolonisation, and stresses the injustice of Britain's delay in granting self-rule to its remaining colonies. His review shows how left-wing audience members could easily read anti-imperial messages possibly against the grain of the theatre or production's overall intentions. In accommodating mass cultural art forms, even conservative bastions like

<sup>138</sup> Ivor Brown, 'Island Story', *Observer*, 30 March 1952.

<sup>139</sup> W. H. Bush, 'Benthall's Magic', *Birmingham Sunday Mercury*, 30 March 1952.

<sup>140</sup> Hugh Philips, 'Timeless Caliban', *Daily Worker*, 29 March 1952.

<sup>141</sup> Philips, 'Timeless Caliban'.

the SMT were propagating ideas that ran counter to their avowed political bias. Overall, Sainthill's work on *The Tempest* is an early signal of the gradual collapse of high-low cultural divisions thanks to the advancement of mass cultural art forms in post-war Britain and the shift towards the radically playful free associations typifying post-modernism.<sup>142</sup> The Americanisation of British cultural consumption in the immediate post-war period ushered in new interpretative possibilities upon the Shakespearean stage. As early as 1951 and 1952 Sainthill's work helped encourage newly politicised readings of what would become the archetypal Shakespearean play-text for anti-colonial readings and adaptations for many international and diasporic writers, activists, and theatre practitioners.<sup>143</sup>

Irrespective of the fact that he was a keen royalist and representative of Australia's former white-settler elite, Sainthill brought a very ambivalent vision with him to the Stratford-upon-Avon stage. In the suggestive ways in which he intermingled varying modes of fantasy his work chimed with Britain's sublimated anxieties. The fact that its potency came from the comingling of 'high' heritage and 'low' populist forms is a reminder that both Britain and Australia were themselves heavily under the spell of American cultural influence at the time.<sup>144</sup> Much of the poignancy in Sainthill's work came from his attempt to update a Neo-Romantic visual tradition that was already giving way to advancing Americanisation. As his biographer put it, 'one does not know whether

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<sup>142</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). The political implications of the social changes brought about by Americanisation vexed both left-wing and right-wing thinkers during the post-war period. The fuller implications were analysed and articulated later in the decade in works such as, Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957) and Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd, 1958).

<sup>143</sup> See Rob Nixon, 'Caribbean and African Appropriations of "The Tempest"', *Critical Inquiry*, 13.3 (1987), 557-78.

<sup>144</sup> See for example, Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

to applaud the future or salute the past, with such an equivocal present' on display in the artist's work.<sup>145</sup>

### **The Coronation of Elizabeth II and The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust Fund**

Britain's post-war challenge of casting a new national identity and global role for itself was clearly evident during the Coronation of Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953.<sup>146</sup> Struggling to make its stale historical allusions relevant to a domestic political scene hungry for democratic change and renewal, New Elizabethanism also relied heavily upon concrete identification with the British state and the weighty symbolism that could be taken from the Coronation events themselves. The public spectacle helped make palpable otherwise 'foggy ideas' about the condition of the nation, with the monarchy providing a living symbolic link that assured 'historical continuity'.<sup>147</sup> As a piece of civic theatre in itself, the Coronation's strengths lay in providing a deliberate show of domestic 'stability, consensus and confidence' whilst also celebrating Britain's continuing imperial status through its procession of colonial troops and the accompanying leaders of various Dominions and Protectorates. In this ritualised display of continuity, it promised a smooth transition from Empire to Commonwealth, despite the challenges of decolonisation and increasingly volatile Cold War antagonisms.<sup>148</sup>

With such a heavy emphasis on history however, the public ceremony of the Coronation also helped reinforce a pervasive sense of insularism that associated the celebration of national cultural icons such as Shakespeare, with refuge and retreat from a

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<sup>145</sup> Robertson, p. 14.

<sup>146</sup> See David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977' in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 44-100; Peter H. Hansen, 'Coronation Everest: The Empire and Commonwealth in the 'Second Elizabethan Age'' in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. by Stuart Ward (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2001), pp. 57-72.

<sup>147</sup> Wiebe, pp. 355-56.

<sup>148</sup> Wiebe, p. 353; Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 93, p. 104.

conspiring modern world. The anxiety and sense of loss that shadowed New Elizabethan rhetoric was evident, according to many commentators, in the events themselves.

Heather Wiebe's study of the troubled reception of Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana* (1953)

which was commissioned for the celebrations, asserts that in the:

obsessive talk of war and hardship [...] the quest for renewal was intermingled with an awareness of trauma [...] expressed through the preoccupation with the past itself.<sup>149</sup>

Overall New Elizabethanism was, in Richard Halpern's phrase, not a 'salvic project' but rather 'a juxtaposition of losses' as it was only in the early-modern period that Britain was able to find 'a sufficiently dark reflection of its own catastrophes' at the dawn of the 1950s.<sup>150</sup>

In Australia, the Coronation was also used to resuscitate the beleaguered project of importing state-validated British Shakespeare. This came hard on the heels of a major setback for 'loyal' and royalist segments of the Australian community who most wanted to strengthen Greater-British cultural links. Between 1951 and 1954 the British Council experienced a series of sudden cuts, and in March 1954 its Sydney Office was abruptly shut down. During the investigative process that led to the Drogheda Report, Lord Swinton arbitrarily wound down British Council operations in Australia, New Zealand, and Ceylon.<sup>151</sup> This came about when the Secretary of State for the Commonwealth and Chairman of the Committee on Civil Expenditure ran a campaign to reduce expenditure on Information Services from £10,200,000 to £9,500,000. In the wake of the British Council's public statement that it 'deeply regret[ted] the decision' there were plenty of dismayed reactions amongst British culture lovers in the Australian press.<sup>152</sup> In the seven years since its arrival, those Australians who had the closest class affinities and identity

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<sup>149</sup> Wiebe, p. 148

<sup>150</sup> Halpern, p. 9.

<sup>151</sup> Donaldson, pp. 191-92.

<sup>152</sup> Ernest W. Burbridge, 'The British Council', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 March 1954, p. 2.

ties to the British Council's ideals of Britishness felt that the organisation had become 'an inspiration to us all' with its sudden departure being compared to the loss 'of an old and valued friend' to whom they had 'continually turned for advice and help'.<sup>153</sup> Those most anxious to see British cultural tours in their cities took aim at what appeared to be the inexplicable decision-making of cold-hearted metropolitan technocrats, stating that 'the touch of the official hand is all too inclined to wither the buds of creative enterprise', and that 'it is not information we require from Britain – the Press already provides this – but inspiration'.<sup>154</sup> Such editorial pieces followed a large volume of readers' letters demonstrating a real sense of injury. London once again seemed to be settling back into its long indifference towards the cultural life of its Dominion subjects and returning to what Lloyd had characterised fifteen years earlier as the British Empire's historic disregard for much beyond sport, trade, and commerce. By this stage, royalist elements in Australia were more enthusiastic about seeing the continuation of Greater-British cultural links than Britain was itself.

Amidst this growing concern, an informal consultation of Australian opinion for 'any wish to establish some form of Australian-UK machinery to take the place of direct British Council representation' drew a very negative response. This led to the British administration's frustrated realisation that it could 'neither formalise or exploit' the 'affection for the mother Country' that 'remains extremely powerful [...] almost against reason' in Australian opinion:

The Australian is proudly Australian yet equally proudly British and therefore, we at the British Council, have to think of ourselves as UK rather than British.<sup>155</sup>

In terms of theatre, one workable solution was attempted in setting up the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust Fund (AETTF). Despite the Old Vic and Guthrie's failure to

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<sup>153</sup> Alistair Morrison, 'The British Council', *Morning Herald*, 12 March 1954, p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> Anon, 'End of the British Council', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 1954, p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> TNA: BW 12/6, 'Representative's Annual Report for April 1954 to March 1955'.

establish an Australian National Theatre, as a ‘continuing memorial to the [Coronation tour] [...] of Her Majesty the Queen’ the AETTF was created in January 1954 with renewed ambition. Dr H. C. Coombs, Governor of the Australian Commonwealth Bank, shared John Maynard Keynes’ vision of state-sponsored arts and lent his influential support to ‘an eclectic but extraordinary group of luminaries’ mostly from the UK.<sup>156</sup> British Council Representatives in Australia and the Drama Department in London put Australian sponsors in touch with the artists and administrators who had previously visited under its auspices.<sup>157</sup> Hugh Hunt, a member of the British Council’s DAC (and whose brother Colonel John Hunt accompanied Hillary’s ascent of Everest, a feat famously timed to coincide with the Coronation itself) was chosen by the selection board. Upon arrival in Australia in January 1955 he set about ‘forming a truly national company’ in place of Australia’s own candidate national companies based in Victoria and New South Wales.<sup>158</sup> Optimistically hoping to emulate the Old Vic’s success in London, the AETTF immediately secured a lease on the Majestic Theatre ‘in an unfashionable district’ that would ‘need the fervour and passion of an Old Vic audience’ to succeed.<sup>159</sup> Ultimately it didn’t, though it did lead to the collapse of both the Victoria and New South Wales companies.<sup>160</sup> By 1956, as the pro-British ardour of the immediate post-war years had cooled considerably, opposition was raised further by the realisation that, like Hunt himself, the Trust’s four leading associates (Elsie Beyer — the former manager of the Old Vic’s *Richard III* tour —, John Sumner, James Mills, and Robert Quentin) were all British and previous Old Vic employees. From the British Council’s perspective however ‘the prospects for drama, ballet and opera are now much better owing to the existence of the AETTF’, passing on the message that officers of the AETTF expressed

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<sup>156</sup> Caldwell, p. 67.

<sup>157</sup> The list included Tyrone Guthrie, Anthony Quayle, Robert Speaight, Martin Brown, and Michael Langham.

<sup>158</sup> Hansen, pp. 60-62; TNA: BW 12/6, ‘Representative’s Annual Report for April 1954 to March 1955’.

<sup>159</sup> TNA: BW 12/6, ‘Representative’s Annual Report for April 1954 to March 1955’.

<sup>160</sup> Gay, p. 190.

‘deep appreciation of the services rendered by the Council both from London and in Australia’.<sup>161</sup>

## Conclusion

In the opening chapter we discussed how the earliest British Shakespeare tours failed to enjoy much diplomatic impact in Fascist Europe or achieve the expansion of British soft power and influence hoped for within post-war Egypt. This second chapter has shown how Shakespearean cultural diplomacy enjoyed improved success in a white-settler Dominion country like Australia between the 1948 and 1953. Profound changes in the global dispensations were ushered in during this early Cold War era as illustrated in key historical events such as the Berlin Airlift of 1948-1949; the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949; and the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. Within this increasingly volatile Cold War environment, the strengthening of Anglo-Dominion ties and anti-Communist policies seemed imperative for Britain’s survival. To conclude, let’s briefly summarise how our three key terms of Shakespeare, decolonisation, and the Cold War, have evolved in meaning over the previous chapter.

By the late 1940s, Shakespeare’s pre-war association with the civilising effects of high art with its attendant emphasis on decision-making elites had given way to more populist approaches. This was a useful development for Shakespearean cultural diplomacy because with the necessary push of ‘star’ actors, the Old Vic tour was able to achieve a level of mass appeal in Australia that seems exceptional in retrospect and only understandable through appreciation of its essentially imperial character at a moment of unique historical duress. Industry figures like Laurence Olivier and Anthony Quayle saw how the opportunities of strengthening Anglo-Dominion relations provided a catalyst for the overseas expansion of Britain’s post-war Shakespeare boom. The tour’s arms-

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<sup>161</sup> TNA: BW 12/6, ‘Liason Officer’s Annual Report For April 1955 to March 1956’.

length government administrators were keen to validate the whole process, and became instrumental in exploiting Australia's cultural cringe in order to assist such theatrical 'pioneers'.

In terms of decolonisation, these tours took place within a period that saw the dissolution of much of Britain's South and South East Asian Empire. Following the independence and partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, Burma became independent and departed the Commonwealth in 1948, whilst Ceylon achieved full independence the same year.<sup>162</sup> In Malaya, a Dependency that suddenly became vital to Britain's post-war economic recovery, British and Commonwealth troops suppressed Communist rebels and attempted to curtail the appeal of Marxist-Leninist ideas to the anti-imperialist cause. At the dawn of the 1950s, the 'domino theory' of un-challenged Communist influence inevitably spreading across the Asian Pacific region began to shape US strategic thinking.<sup>163</sup> Thanks to its imperial legacy, Britain's influence and intelligence gathering capabilities across much of the emerging Third World ensured growing US tolerance toward its policy of deferred independence, especially in those countries considered most susceptible to Soviet influence.<sup>164</sup> Britain's ostensible survival as an independent, though much reduced power behind the United States and the Soviet Union hinged upon its usefulness to this broader anti-Communist struggle.

Despite the sudden reduction to British Council funding the 'Independent Committee of Enquiry into the Overseas Information Services' that spent a year and a half investigating the projection of Britain abroad by Embassies, the BBC, and the British Council, ultimately condoned the use of cultural-diplomatic practices overseas. It

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<sup>162</sup> For a useful timeline and chronology see, Poddar and Johnson, pp. xvi-xvii. For decolonisation in South East Asia immediately following 1945 see Springhall, pp. 31-64.

<sup>163</sup> On the domino theory see, Peter T. Leeson and Andrea Dean, 'The Democratic Domino Theory', *American Journal of Political Science*, 53.3 (2009), 533-51.

<sup>164</sup> On imperial security and anti-communist intelligence sharing between Britain and the United States during the early Cold War, see Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, The Cold War, and The Twilight of Empire* (London: Harper Press, 2013), pp. 141-42, pp. 153-55.



acknowledged that given the deepening Cold War challenges of the era, 'a modern Government has to concern itself with public opinion abroad and be properly equipped to deal with it'. In a neat statement acknowledging the *realpolitik* underlying what may to many have previously appeared to be ill-defined or free-floating cultural initiatives, the report concluded that the goal of the Information Services 'must always be to achieve in the long run some definite political or commercial result' for the British state.<sup>165</sup> Despite this apparent clarification of past and future diplomatic practices, specific results had already been achieved in Australia by the time of the British Council's withdrawal in the mid-1950s. From then on the practice of 'positive projection' (that is, advertising the British way of life for seemingly altruistic or non-specific goals) came to an end, and cultural diplomacy evolved into a more overtly political practice. From the mid-1950s, it would become part of a range of active measures aimed at countering Communist influence at home and abroad following the death of Stalin.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> In Phillipson, p. 145.

<sup>166</sup> Defty, pp. 163-71.

## Chapter 3.

### Shakespeare and the Cultural Cold War: *Titus Andronicus* in Eastern Europe

By the mid 1950s, the British Council's overseas promotion of the UK's theatrical culture faced mounting difficulties. Despite ever growing demand and increased international competition, serious underfunding curtailed the organisation's effectiveness within a crowded field of competing national cultures. As an illustration of this fraught context, the DAC's 'Paper on Theatre Export' of February 1956 is worth quoting at length. It provides concise commentary on the challenging, political nature of the international touring theatre scene that had evolved by that stage under the influence of Cold War competition:

since the war more and more countries have [...] use[d] their Art of the Theatre [...] as a means of cultural propaganda [and] increase[d] their national subsidies for these manifestations. In the same period Britain has reduced her allowance from £40,000 in 1946 to £3,250 in the financial year 1953/54 at which figure it remains for 1956/57. This [...] only enables the Council to provide small guarantees against loss [...] in easily accessible countries which can contribute substantially to the financing [...] Such important areas as Finland, South-East Europe and Turkey, India, the Far East and Latin America are closed to us as are many of the most notable International Festivals [...] At the Paris International Festival of Drama, 1955 [...] Sweden, Belgium, Germany East, Italy, Norway, Holland, Germany West, Yugoslavia, Finland, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, USA, Canada, China, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Greece [were represented by companies subsidised by their respective governments] [...] And Britain by a small unsubsidised company, Theatre Workshop which got into some financial difficulty from which they were extracted by the French [...] the Comedie-Française, Jean Vilar's Theatre National Populaire, and lesser French companies have visited almost all European countries and Turkey. Yugoslav companies have toured extensively in Europe and as far afield as Malaya. Russia has sent, and is sending, companies to the

Far East and India. The Chinese State Opera and Ballet has been touring continuously since [...] 1955. The Burg Theatre in Vienna is planning a number of exchanges with Russian and German Companies and the Vienna State Opera [...] The Moscow Arts Theatre is to tour Yugoslavia and the other Balkan countries this year and the American production of 'Porgy and Bess', having completed a long Latin American engagement and tours in Russia and Poland, is also proceeding to the Balkans.<sup>1</sup>

By the DAC's estimates, Belgium subsidised its theatre annually to the sum of £755,000, France: £1,495,000, Italy: £3,400,000, while even Yugoslavia was contributing as much as £59,000 as grants-in-aid. Although the United States gave no direct federal subsidies, the State Department donated \$2,500,000 for the promotion of international touring:

H. M. Ambassadors and the Council's Representatives in half the civilised countries of the world write with increasing frequency, emphasising the importance for British prestige of 'major theatrical manifestations' [...] letters refer to the extensive use made [...] by other countries in conducting their cultural campaigns and deplore our inability to compete [...] Engagements to which particular importance is attached [...] include [...] a Shakespeare Company for South-East Europe and Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

Britain was not only in danger of failing to deploy anywhere near the number of productions required to compete effectively within this crowded field, but was increasingly finding itself the target of other nation's cultural propaganda, especially from America and the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the prohibitive financial challenges of taking a Shakespeare company to South East Europe, the British Council did manage to sponsor a number of significant tours in the mid 1950s not only to countries that were difficult to reach such as Yugoslavia, but to other politically sensitive destinations behind the Iron Curtain. This was due in no small measure to the DAC's alignment with the Soviet Relations

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 120/1 Drama Advisory Committee: minutes of meetings, 1939-1957, 'Paper on Theatre Export', 28 February 1956.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 'Paper on Theatre Export', 28 February 1956.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, David Monod, 'He is a Cripple an' Needs my Love': *Porgy and Bess* as Cold War Propaganda', in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960*, ed. by Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 300-12.

Committee (SRC), a recently established Cultural Cold War body that by September 1955 was submitting ‘a long list of proposals for the exchange of delegations, cultural manifestations etc.’ including ‘The Stratford Company or Old Vic for three weeks early in 1956’.<sup>4</sup> The SRC was a politically motivated, anti-Communist organisation that was placed within the nominally non-political and non-governmental body of the British Council in order to regain control of cultural exchanges between the Britain and the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Formed in 1955 for the promotion of closer relations between Britain and the USSR, the SRC deliberately sought to undermine Communist-friendly domestic groups such as the British-Soviet Friendship Society, and the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR. At the time such groups were receiving ever-growing legitimacy and support from Moscow via bilateral channels of inter-cultural exchange that effectively circumnavigated the British Government and Britain’s more entrenched establishment institutions.<sup>6</sup>

Through an examination of the political, institutional, and creative elements that constitute the performance history of a Shakespeare Memorial Theatre touring production of *Titus Andronicus* to Eastern Europe, this chapter provides a detailed historical account of the impact that this Cultural Cold War had on Britain’s Shakespeare industry in the mid-1950s. Peter Brook’s SMT production constitutes a pertinent case study as it was a successful product of the British Council/SRC programme that took British theatre directly behind the Iron Curtain. Originally staged at the SMT in 1955, the *Titus Andronicus* tour was the result of a thaw in cultural relations between the Soviet Union and the West that brought increased opportunity for theatrical exchanges.<sup>7</sup> Although the original show belonged to the SMT by the time *Titus Andronicus* toured

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<sup>4</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 13 September 1955.

<sup>5</sup> Aiko Watanabe, ‘Cultural Drives by the Periphery: Britain’s Experiences’, *History in Focus*, 10 (2006), p. 1. <<https://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/cold/articles/watanabe.html>> [Accessed 30 March 2016].

<sup>6</sup> See Christopher Mayhew, *War of Words: A Cold War Witness* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Watanabe, p. 1.

Europe it constituted a joint venture between them, Laurence Olivier Productions (LOP), and the British Council, and was revived for touring purposes in 1957 when the opportunity arose.<sup>8</sup> This circuit started at the Theatre Des Nations in Paris, giving ten performances from 15 to 25 May, before moving on to La Fenice in Venice for three performances between the 28 and 30 May; the National Theatre in Belgrade for three shows from 2 to 4 June; two performances at the National Theatre in Zagreb on 7 and 8 June; four at the Burgtheater in Vienna between 12 and 15 June; and concluded at the National Theatre in Warsaw with four performances between 18 and 21 June. In this chapter I consider the ways in which the *Titus Andronicus* tour deliberately traversed a fault-line in Soviet hegemony during a critical period in the Cold War.

As much scholarship has shown, the Cultural Cold War had far-reaching implications not only for the institutions involved but also for the individual artists enlisted in it.<sup>9</sup> On the company's return flight, a 'weary' Sir Lawrence Olivier congratulated his fellow actors over the public address system with the famous lines from *Henry V* 'Where ne'er from France returned more happier men'.<sup>10</sup> Given the speech's association with martial contexts, did the company of actors see themselves as Cold War warriors returning in triumph? On *Titus Andronicus*'s first night back in London at the Stoll Theatre, the stressful effects of lengthy touring were in evidence when Olivier made 'a weird curtain speech' full of 'flowery phrases and uncomfortable jokes' that gave

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<sup>8</sup> The touring cast was almost identical to the original 1955 production and totalled fifty-seven members, including: Laurence Olivier (Titus), Vivienne Leigh (Lavinia), Anthony Quayle (Aaron), Maxine Audrey (Tamora), Alan Webb, Frank Thring, Kevin Miles, Lee Montague, Edward Atienza, Basil Hoskine, Ralph Michael, Rosalind Atkinson, Ian Holm, and Michael Blakemore who replaced James Groult. Blakemore, p. 148.

<sup>9</sup> See, David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1951* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Blakemore, p. 170; *Henry V*, IV. 8. 126, in Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 595-626.

the impression he was ‘apologising for the evening’.<sup>11</sup> The theatre critic J. C. Trewin also noted that:

after addressing us as Ladies and Gentlemen in seven languages, Olivier said in his speech of thanks that Titus, once so obscure, was now so popular that it might be filmed, set to music, or skated.<sup>12</sup>

By stressing the infinite potential for adaptation and appropriation presented by such an obscure play, Olivier seems to foreground the absurd lengths taken in making Shakespeare appear as relevant and contemporary as possible. His speech begs the question as to why *Titus Andronicus*, which was considered an almost extra-canonical Shakespeare text up until that point, was chosen to tour Eastern Europe in the first place. In channelling the tragi-comic music hall spirit of Archie Rice (the lead character of John Osborne’s *The Entertainer* (1957), another part that the actor was receiving critical acclaim for that same year), did Olivier’s words signal an uncomfortable awareness of the absurd lengths the tour went to, or even the fundamental insincerity behind its cultural-diplomatic mission?

The most important legacy of the tour came from the meeting of the production’s director Peter Brook and the Polish academic Jan Kott following *Titus Andronicus*’s final performance in Warsaw.<sup>13</sup> At an award ceremony celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first publication of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, the influential Polish émigré stated that:

it was the most important day of my life to see *Titus Andronicus* [...] and the beginning [...] of my book was with that production perhaps! After that my life changed. I was invited by Peter to come to London, which then was a long, long way.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Blakemore, p. 171.

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Trewin, *Peter Brook: A Biography* (London: Macdonald, 1971), p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> The most prominent Royal Shakespeare Company productions influenced by Kott’s ideas were Peter Brook’s *King Lear* (1962), Peter Hall and John Barton’s *War of the Roses* (1963-4), and Peter Hall’s *Hamlet* (1965). A recent article reiterated the reach of Kott’s legacy, claiming that ‘if we still see Shakespeare as our contemporary, we have a largely forgotten Polish theatrical scholar to thank for it’. Michael Billington, ‘K is for Kott’, *The Guardian*, 2 February 2012.

<sup>14</sup> John Elsom, ed., *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1990), p. 98.

Kott's late acknowledgement of the importance that the touring production had for him in academic, artistic, and personal terms is commonly masked behind a well-established narrative that it was Kott's critical writing that influenced Brook's *King Lear* and subsequently British theatre from the early-to-mid 1960s onwards.<sup>15</sup> Reviewing *Titus Andronicus* and meeting Brook did not only have an impact on Kott's thinking towards Shakespeare. It also provided him with a passport to the West, the realisation of his ambition to become a dramatic and academic advisor on a number of theatrical productions, and the development and writing of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* itself. This was to be a seminal text that Brook would be instrumental in getting translated and published for the English-speaking market.<sup>16</sup> Such issues beg the obvious question of how Brook and the British cultural establishment benefitted from their close relationship with this dissident émigré writer. What was Kott's political and intellectual biography at the time the *Titus Andronicus* tour arrived in Warsaw in the summer of 1957? How was it that a prominent member of the Polish Communist Party's cultural apparatus became pivotal in validating British assertions that Shakespeare could provide unique insight into the iniquities of Soviet Communism? Furthermore, this chapter will consider what immediate and long-term impact the importation of such an overtly political Shakespeare had on Britain's own theatre industry.<sup>17</sup>

### **Military Stalemate and the Rise of Culture**

The *Titus Andronicus* tour 'Behind the Iron Curtain' as the publicity put it, is an example of how cultural diplomacy rose in response to military stalemate during a decisive period

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare: Theatre and the Making of Ideology', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985) pp. 182-205.

<sup>16</sup> In a 1985 interview, Kott stated that the 'most exciting time in my life was cooperating on productions with Peter Brook and Giorgio Strehler' with his ideal professional relationship being 'a dramaturge for the great directors'. Eric Pace, 'Jan Kott 87, Critic and Shakespeare Scholar', *New York Times*, 4 January 2002.

<sup>17</sup> For an influential and wide-ranging discussion on the impact that right-wing continental political dissidents such as Kott had in shaping twentieth-century British intellectual life see, Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review*, 50 (1968), 3-57.

in the Cold War. The Soviet Union's formation of the Warsaw Pact in May 1955 (a direct response to the West's formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)) is illustrative of this hardening of divisions across Europe. Despite Stalin's death in March 1953 little success was had in deescalating tensions on the continent, with America maintaining the binary view that the Cold War remained an 'irreconcilable conflict'.<sup>18</sup>

In 1955 Austria became a sovereign neutral state with the retreat of both Soviet and Allied military forces from its territory. Soon after, Khrushchev's 'secret' speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 denounced Stalinist crimes and conceded the possibility of different paths to Communist Socialism. This was a point of unique importance to Eastern Bloc states, emerging postcolonial nations, and non-aligned Communist countries such as Yugoslavia.<sup>19</sup> Although the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary model had been attractive to many Third World resistance movements for decades, Stalin's intolerance towards any autonomous or non-Soviet socialist models was viewed as a hindrance to the flexibility and plurality needed for effective anti-colonial struggle.<sup>20</sup> Khrushchev's move away from Stalinist orthodoxy led to a massive increase in Soviet material support across Africa and Asia, increasing Moscow's global influence and setting the scene for armed anti-colonial struggles and proxy wars across the Third World over the coming decades.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In Mark G. Toulouse, *The Transformation of John Foster Dulles* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), p. 161.

<sup>19</sup> In February 1961 the American Secretary of State Dean Rusk announced that the Cold War had moved 'from the military problem in Western Europe to a genuine contest for the underdeveloped countries [...] not on a military plane in the first instance, but for influence, prestige, loyalty, and so forth, and the stakes there are very high'. In Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 60-64.

<sup>20</sup> For a classic critique of Stalinism's limitations for the anti-imperial struggle see, C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917-1937: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1937). A pertinent example in the early Cold War was the on-going Sino-Soviet divisions dating from the 1930s. These continued following the foundation of The Peoples' Republic of China in 1949, and even intensified following Stalin's death in 1953. See, Prashad, p. 37; Westad, pp. 158-65.

<sup>21</sup> Czech arms sales to Nasser's Egypt in the mid-1950s were a striking example. See, Prashad, pp. 47-50, p. 99.



Encouraged by Khrushchev's initial declarations, Poland and Hungary immediately tested the limits of the new Soviet stance by striving to establish a more independent and national character in their own applications of Communism. In 1956 Poland's summer uprising, which was subsequently quelled by the Red Army, led to an apparent compromise with the instalment of Wladyslaw Gomulka as Party Chairman. Hungary attempted to go even further by declaring itself a fully neutral nation via Radio Free Europe. Khrushchev seized upon the opportunity of the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt to deploy a two million strong military force against the uprising. As the Red Army advanced upon Budapest, the Hungarian resistance's appeals for intervention from the 'free world' and the United Nations went in vain.<sup>22</sup>

The crushing of the Hungarian uprising illustrated the impotence and unwillingness of the West to confront Russia militarily within its established sphere of influence on the European continent. The fact that the Suez crisis occurred simultaneously also reinforced the notion that, from the viewpoint of smaller nations, Western and Soviet modes of imperial domination were equivalent. The way in which the legacy of European imperialism complicated American Cold War policy was starkly illustrated during the Suez crisis.<sup>23</sup> It earned Britain the unique experience of being lambasted from all international corners, eliciting both a Soviet threat of retaliation and America's forceful public condemnation.<sup>24</sup> After the events in Egypt and Hungary, recognition of an 'existing *status quo* in Europe' that neither side 'would risk war to overturn' became entrenched, while the Third World became an increasingly significant site of Cold War contestation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), p. 111.

<sup>23</sup> Prashad, pp. 97-100.

<sup>24</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower stated on 1 January 1957 that 'the existing vacuum [of European Colonial retreat] in the Middle East must be filled by the United States before it is filled by Russia'. In J. M. Lee, p. 126.

<sup>25</sup> McMahon, p. 64.

On a cultural level, the military stalemate in Europe led to a tentative ‘thaw’ in East-West relations. It witnessed the arts becoming a more prominent battleground in a war of ideology and propaganda. A quick survey of the *Titus Andronicus* tour’s itinerary from Paris to Venice, Belgrade, Zagreb, Vienna, and Warsaw, indicates how it sought to exploit some of the weaker areas in the Soviet Union’s sphere of control and influence by playing nations that strove towards either independence or neutrality. These were countries where Britain would gain most from forging or re-strengthening ties. Paris for instance, had long been viewed as a hotbed of Communist sympathisers and fellow travellers. The CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) had moved there from Berlin in order to be more effective in its aim of converting neutralists and the moderate left to anti-Communism.<sup>26</sup> In France following the Hungarian uprising, influential Communists such as Jean-Paul Sartre turned publicly against the new Soviet leadership labelling them ‘a group which today surpasses Stalinism after having denounced it’.<sup>27</sup> At the same time Austria found itself receiving thousands of Hungarian refugees fleeing the Soviet reprisals after the failed October revolution.<sup>28</sup> Poland tested the cultural thaw by permitting new levels of artistic freedom that reflected hopes for a more independent form of national Communism. Theatre artists that sought to test this new tolerance often turned to Shakespeare, with examples such as Krystyna Skuszanka’s 1956 *Measure for Measure* exploring the predicament of individualism lived under totalitarian rule, a subversive gesture that the state was willing to concede within this more permissive political climate.<sup>29</sup>

Yugoslavia held a dual interest for Britain. It not only represented a chink in the armour of Soviet hegemony but had also become an influential adversary to British

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<sup>26</sup> Saunders, pp. 302-06.

<sup>27</sup> In Saunders, p. 305.

<sup>28</sup> Saunders, p. 304.

<sup>29</sup> Krystyna Kujawska Courtney, ‘Krystyna Skuszanka’s Shakespeare of Political Allusions and Metaphors in Communist Poland’, in *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*, ed. by Irena R. Makaryk and Joseph G. Price (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 228-45, (p. 235).

imperialism, especially in regard to Egypt.<sup>30</sup> In 1957 Josip Broz Tito was in the process of making Yugoslavia the key European champion of global non-alignment. He linked his country to an array of Third World nations in a collaborative attempt to build a broad coalition of developing and newly independent countries that saw their mutual survival predicated upon extraction from the Cold War's binary logic. Mark Atwood Lawrence argues that, despite breaking from the Soviet Union in 1948, Tito's ability to maintain commitment to Socialist principles while also accepting US aid offered 'an attractive model' to many decolonising nations, whilst Yugoslavia's staunch support 'for anti-colonial causes won Tito further friends around the globe'.<sup>31</sup> In Lawrence's assessment, non-alignment constituted an:

eminently sensible response to Cold War binaries by poor nations [...] the 'colonial world' was, in the words of radical philosopher Frantz Fanon, a 'Manichean world,' pitting coloniser against colonised in a struggle that allowed no middle ground. It is hardly surprising that many postcolonial governments rejected membership in Cold War blocs that appeared likely to submerge the independence of weak states within a broad geopolitical agenda.<sup>32</sup>

As the Cold War's global dimensions grew in inverse proportion to Britain's diminishing power and prestige, increased investment in cultural diplomacy made a great deal of sense. This was especially so in Eastern Europe where ancient cultural ties, subsumed national identities, and shared Enlightenment values, pre-dated current Cold War antagonisms.

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<sup>30</sup> After its break with Stalinism in 1948 'Yugoslavia developed a unique set of policies' and became a respected international player outside of the two power blocks. It was eventually able to re-normalise relations with the Soviet Union in 1955 following Stalin's death. According to Glenny, 'no Communist country enjoyed such warm relations with the West whilst being acknowledged as a full, yet independent, member of the 'socialist camp''. Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers 1804-2012* (London: Granta, 2012), p. 570.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, 'The Rise and Fall of Nonalignment', in *The Cold War in the Third World*, ed. by Robert J. McMahon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 139-155, (p.144). Tito's ideas were closely shared by prominent Third World leaders such as Nasser in Egypt and Nehru in India, and grew in popularity after 1958. By 1961 Belgrade became the site for launching the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with its agenda of 'ending both colonialism and the Cold-War'. Furthermore, unlike the earlier Bandung conference (April 18-24, 1955), NAM shunned Communist and US Allied countries, promising 'to speak with a bold and independent voice in global affairs'. Lawrence, p. 145. Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 17-22.

<sup>32</sup> Lawrence, pp. 140-41.

### The Soviet Relations Committee

As a global contest between two competing world systems, the Cultural Cold War witnessed a 'primacy of ideology' that was technologically driven by the mass and global dissemination of books, magazines, film, radio, and television alongside older networks such as theatres, concert halls, and galleries.<sup>33</sup> As commentators have noted, the effect of such covert and overt international cultural mobilisation was a collapse of state-civil boundaries and the creation of what Scott Lucas terms 'state-private networks'.<sup>34</sup> Wittingly or not, such networks of covert sponsorship and informal collaboration in service to anti-Communism inevitably compromised individual artists, cultural institutions, the press, and the various networks of dissemination that operated within its paradigms.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of countering Communist influence, Shakespeare was one of the few cultural entities that stood a reasonable chance of being accepted by Soviet Russia and its satellite states given their stringent efforts to filter out all Western propaganda. Primarily this was because Shakespeare had been designated orthodox status throughout the Communist world since the dawn of the Russian Revolution.<sup>36</sup> The Soviet embrace of Shakespeare was initially based on fostering 'political ideology, to educate the proletariat, and to establish Western roots in the previous great rebellion, the European Renaissance'.<sup>37</sup> Karl Marx regarded Shakespeare a writer of genius, whose own historical moment held the revolutionary potential for the creation of a classless society, though it

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<sup>33</sup> Cate, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Cate, pp. 53-72.

<sup>35</sup> On the unwitting enlistment of many writers and artists into CIA funded anti-Communist cultural activities, see Saunders; Andrew N. Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture and the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> A 'mammoth portrait of Shakespeare' hung over the All Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 whilst Maxim Gorki urged Soviet writers to imitate 'the worlds greatest writer'. Makaryk and Price, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Alexandr Parfenov and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Russian Essays on Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1998), p. 12.

was ultimately thwarted by the creation of a new merchant class.<sup>38</sup> Hailed as a shining example of cultural humanism, Shakespeare's inclusion within the canon of Socialist Realism saw five million copies of his plays published in the twenty-eight languages of the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1939.<sup>39</sup>

Although there were more productions of Shakespeare being staged in Soviet theatres than in Britain and America combined prior to World War Two, this status came under increased scrutiny during Stalin's post-war rule. The dictator recognised that Shakespeare in performance could constitute a varied, protean, and ungovernable site able to shelter and accommodate politically unorthodox ideas. Staged productions could host the kinds of slippery anti-doctrinal elements that state-censors would struggle to decode or detect fully. Characterising this Stalinist antagonism towards Shakespeare, Dmireii Shostakovich claimed that:

*Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Stalin could stand neither of those plays [...] Shakespeare was a seer – man stalks power, walking knee-deep in blood. And he was so naïve, Shakespeare. Pangs of conscience and guilt and all that. *What* guilty conscience? [...] our best Lear was Mikhoels in the Jewish Theatre and everyone knows his fate. A terrible fate. And what about the fate of our best translator of Shakespeare — Pasternak? [...] no it is better not to become involved with Shakespeare [...] That Shakespeare is highly explosive.<sup>40</sup>

Khrushchev's 'thaw' between 1954 and 1960 would see the reinvigoration of Soviet Shakespeare, with the publication of a major new edition of Shakespeare's complete works between 1958 and 1960 featuring commentary by Alexandr Smirnov and Alexandr Anikst.<sup>41</sup> The thaw of the early post-Stalin years saw the return of Shakespeare performances in the Soviet Union, and even more so across the Eastern bloc where the

<sup>38</sup> Alexandr Parfenov and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Russian Essays on Shakespeare*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Alexandr Parfenov and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Russian Essays on Shakespeare*, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Dmireii Shostakovich, *Testimony: Memoirs as Related to Solomon Volkov* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) p. 65; Caute, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> For Soviet publications on Shakespeare see, Alexandre Smirnov, *Shakespeare: A Marxist Interpretation* (New York, NY: Critics Group, 1939); Michael Alexeev, *Shakespeare and the Russian Culture* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1965); V. P. Komarova, *The Individual and the State in the History Plays of Shakespeare* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977); Roman Samarin, *Shakespeare in the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Institute of World Literature, 1986).

texts quickly became a coded means of critiquing Soviet rule. Given these factors, Shakespeare was ideal material for Britain's cultural offensive behind the Iron Curtain. It not only signalled a shared intellectual heritage that connected Britain and Europe prior to the Cold War schism, but also had the potential to foster and encourage anti-Communist sentiment.

Chairing the newly created Soviet Relations Committee, and giving political direction and coordination to the British Council's cultural deployments at the time was Christopher Mayhew. Mayhew had been Junior Foreign Minister under Aneurin Bevan and founder of the Information Research Department (IRD), Britain's principal anti-Communist intelligence unit that fed authoritative and facts-based anti-Soviet propaganda to global news networks via Embassies, press syndicates, and publishers during the earliest stages of the Cold War.<sup>42</sup> The stringent cuts made to the British Council's budget during the 1950s led to a marked reduction in positive propaganda efforts (the more diffuse projection of 'British values' or 'ways of life'), with the scant resources allocated to theatre tours directed more towards countering Communism.<sup>43</sup> Mayhew felt that a good way to 'dispel the illusion' that Russia could use its 'friendship societies' to ignore and bypass the British cultural establishment was by 'choking off Soviet contacts with the left wing'.<sup>44</sup> The SRC enjoyed very early success and within a short time Mayhew was meeting with the Soviet Minister of Culture:

on behalf of a dazzling array of leading cultural and educational establishments [...] [it] marked the beginning of a bizarre cultural cold war. Both sides wanted to increase contacts, but both disagreed sharply about their nature and purpose [...] our aims were political. We wanted to break down the isolation of the Soviet people from the West and to disrupt their ties with British communists and 'fellow travellers'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Christopher Mayhew, *Time to Explain; An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 108-12.

<sup>43</sup> Defty, pp. 163-71.

<sup>44</sup> Mayhew, *Time to Explain*, p. 139.

<sup>45</sup> Mayhew, *Time to Explain*, p. 139.

Between 1955 and 1959 the SRC significantly increased the number of British artists, scientists, and students visiting the USSR. Although the British Council managed the detailed handling of professional visitors to the UK (the Bolshoi Ballet visit to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1956 was a notable and high profile example) it was the SRC, a group 'laced with political intent' that vetted and instigated such exchanges in the first place.<sup>46</sup>

As Aiko Watanabe glosses it:

Whilst resisting Soviet advances to create a formalised agreement, the SRC acted as a stent, keeping open a channel of communication with the Soviet authorities, and implanting – in Soviet eyes – the corruptive seeds of democracy [...] Britain's cultural diplomacy in this period was a raft of unique and subtle strategies, which [...] attempted to challenge the Communist cultural hegemony.<sup>47</sup>

As it took the machinations of state-private networks employing a 'raft of unique and subtle strategies' to wrong-foot Soviet censorship, there is a strong probability that some domestic theatrical productions were conceived and produced with the prior intention of touring the Eastern bloc. The 1955 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre production of *Titus Andronicus* is a strong candidate for such a production as it has a number of intriguing characteristics. On a practical level, the actors of the original production had 'agreed' with the SMT 'when the contract for the 1955 Stratford Season was made' that they would be available for foreign touring, though the intended destination was never specified.<sup>48</sup> The production also displayed a sharp and effective antagonism towards Soviet notions of history and Communist ideology more generally. The performance documents suggest that it countered any notion that a rational understanding of historical process could provide the basis for the better organisation of society, or lead towards the kind of utopian society that Soviet propaganda claimed itself to be achieving. The production replaced such teleological ideas with a cyclical vision of history as the inexorably repetition of violent power struggles brought about by the

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<sup>46</sup> Watanabe, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Watanabe, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Coleman, p. 297.

mysterious inner compulsions of an innately destructive human nature. Given the public airing of Stalin's crimes and the recent suppression of the Hungarian uprising, its worldview bolstered the notion that Khrushchev would inevitably be following the same blood stained path as his predecessor.

By 1955 the DAC was considering a Russian request to the SRC for a winter tour, though:

As neither the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company of Stratford nor the Old Vic would be available to visit Moscow during the Winter of 1955 the Committee was asked to consider a suggestion that the Russians should invite Tennant Productions Ltd. to present Peter Brook's production of *Hamlet*. This company could visit Russia for 2 weeks from 20<sup>th</sup> November.<sup>49</sup>

This request however was impossible for the SMT to fulfil as it only ran for a short summer season. Once this window of opportunity for touring the Soviet Union was missed, LOP took the unusual step of purchasing the entire show, costumes, props, music, and all, and placing them in storage until a future opportunity arose to tour the Communist world, as it soon would in 1957.

### **Competing *Hamlets* in Moscow (1955)**

The practical challenges of putting a production together and getting it to Russia quickly enough to avoid censorship were considerable, though the British Council was becoming adept at responding flexibly to rapidly changing circumstances. This is demonstrated by the fact that it was Peter Brook, *Titus Andronicus*' Russian-speaking director, who was tasked with accepting the Russian invitation and putting an emergency production of *Hamlet* together in just three weeks. The strategy was to turn such an impractical challenge into a propaganda victory by advertising the feat and producing a sparse, minimalist production, with a young cast and fluid staging which allowed the action to

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<sup>49</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 13 September 1955.



move 'like the wind'.<sup>50</sup> The choice of play itself was deliberately confrontational as everything 'lauded in Brook's *mise-en-scene*' stood in direct opposition to the first major production of Shakespeare in Moscow since the end of the Second World War, Nikolay Okhlupov's gargantuan staging of *Hamlet*. The result of over a year's rehearsal, Okhlupov's production was 'monumental' and 'visually complex', featuring a company of seventy and an orchestra of thirty. In contrast, Brook's staging was 'spartan', 'plain', and 'dark', with thirty players and no music whatsoever. Okhlupov's prince Hamlet, Evgenii Samoilov, was forty-four years old and 'came across as a *danseur noble*' whilst Schofield, ten years his younger, 'diffused a sense of moral goodness from within'.<sup>51</sup>

Okhlupov's dissident controlling motif that 'Denmark is a Prison' governed the production's entire visual conceptualisation, with Vadim Rydin's set consisting of a wall of bronze gates that opened into twelve separate cell-like platforms:

This metallic superstructure was always present as the overriding metaphor of incarceration and repression, the 'confines, wards and dungeons' that hem the human spirit [...] the gates suggested the mechanical maw of an ominous state, half living, half automation.<sup>52</sup>

The Russian Shakespeare academic Aleksandr Anikst states that Moscow audiences were well aware of the director's intention of delivering a subversive message. He noted however, that dress rehearsal interventions made by the Ministry of Culture's Committee for Artistic Affairs forced colour and painted realist backdrops upon the set, changes sufficient enough to allow critics to completely misinterpret Okhlupov's intentions:

his production [...] emerged not as a tragedy, but as a joyous, festive production expressing his gratification that Denmark the prison is no more, that he – the artist – has been unfettered, that he has freedom to create.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Tynan, 'King's Rhapsody: *Hamlet* with Paul Schofield, Directed by Peter Brook', *Observer*, 11 December 1955. For a prior example of the British Council turning a lack of preparation and funding to their diplomatic advantage, see Noel Annan's account of the Marlowe Society visit to Berlin in 1948. Noel Annan, *Changing Enemies* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), pp. 237-39. See also, Erica Sheen, 'Mystery in the Soul of State: Shakespeare in Airlift Berlin', in *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe*, pp. 9-22.

<sup>51</sup> Laurence Senelick, 'Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all': New Documentation on the Okhlupov *Hamlet*, in *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*, pp. 136-56 (p. 153).

<sup>52</sup> Senelick, p. 136-37.

<sup>53</sup> Senelick, p. 139.

Overall the Socialist Realist touches resulted in a kind of ‘totalitarian baroque’ that blunted any sharp edges in the production’s critique of life lived within Soviet society.

The official view that in the USSR tragedy only existed in the past, is captured in

Kenneth Tynan’s review of Brook’s Moscow tour for *The Observer*:

Mr Zubov, the director of the Maly Theatre, put it to me very clearly [...] social tragedy was unthinkable. In Soviet society a man could never be trapped. I mentioned *Hamlet*. ‘Ah’ he said [...] ‘it is a golden page of the past.’ And he added that the circumstances which created the anguish of Lear and Macbeth simply did not exist. ‘In our society,’ he concluded, ‘there may be collisions but there are no defeats’.<sup>54</sup>

Brook elaborated further on the contradictions and tensions that were evident within the post-war Soviet theatre, stating that:

The Russian has fallen into a subtle trap. He wanted to both win his war and yet preserve all that he treasured. The Russian revolutionary (to his undying credit, it must be said), having recognised the value of his opera and ballet and his dramatic theatre, preserved these institutions completely with their traditional way of work [...] splendour is coupled with reverence, lavishness and mastery of execution [...] the theatre of an actively militant nation became deeply traditional: slow in method, mature in result, romantic in quality, escapist in effect.<sup>55</sup>

In fact there were some interesting discrepancies in Brook’s *Hamlet* as well.

Although Muscovites greeted the Brook *Hamlet* with immense enthusiasm (as much as to acknowledge ‘a new East-West entente’ as to welcome ‘a fresh approach to Shakespeare’), its reception upon return to Britain was very subdued.<sup>56</sup> Reviews ranged from polite silence to hostility towards what was generally considered to be a tepid, uninspiring, and pedestrian production. This discrepancy indicates a revealing tension in the reception of shows that were produced in Britain but primarily intended for overseas audiences. Similar issues can also be traced in the British reception of the original 1955

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Tynan, ‘The Russian Way’, *Observer*, November 1955.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Kustow, *Peter Brook: A Biography* (London: St Martins Press, 2005), pp. 199-200.

<sup>56</sup> Senelick, p. 153.

staging of *Titus Andronicus*, two years before it finally went on to tour the Communist world itself.

### **The Canonisation of *Titus Andronicus* for Cold War Audiences**

Most critics agree that Brook's 1955 production of *Titus Andronicus* was a landmark in the play's performance history.<sup>57</sup> Although subsequently performed with regularity on the British stage, there had been a consensus view before 1955 that the play's violence made it unpalatable and unfit for most audiences' sensibilities. This in turn corresponded with common doubt over Shakespeare's authorship, a view stretching back over three hundred and fifty years. Before considering how and why Brook overcame such an unpromising performance history, it is worth briefly establishing the nature of the play's reception up to that point.

The preface to Edward Ravenscroft 1687 adaptation provides the first textual evidence suggesting that the piece was co-authored; a view continued by subsequent critics who voiced a general disbelief that Shakespeare could have written such a 'barbarous' text.<sup>58</sup> According to Brian Vickers, these early doubts were not based on solid scholarly evidence at all but rather 'expressed an aesthetic-ethical dislike' for the play's many scenes of brutality. Victorian-era critics simply rationalised their 'distaste for the play's offences against 'taste' and decorum' by 'denying its authenticity'.<sup>59</sup> Although there had been little recourse to textual analysis in support of such prejudices previously, the twentieth century saw the emergence of scholarly authorship tests that supported the idea of co-authorship. Building upon the accumulated history of textual study focusing upon the play's rhetorical characteristics, Vickers concludes that 'qualitative differences

<sup>57</sup> Alan. C. Dessen, *Titus Andronicus: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 150-52.

<sup>59</sup> Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, p. 242, Table 3.19.

clearly distinguish two different hands at work' concluding that George Peele wrote Act I and quite possibly II.1, II.2, and IV.1.<sup>60</sup>

Not only did Brook deliberately set himself against such a long and fraught reception history when choosing to stage *Titus Andronicus* over *Macbeth* during the 1955 season but, by staging it at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, he also set out to reclaim this vexatious play-text for the Shakespearean canon through performance.<sup>61</sup> A key factor in the director's choice was his conviction that the play's notorious scenes of violence were now topical and able to speak to Cold War audiences. Alan Dessen's performance history notes Brook's initial claim that British audiences 'only ten years removed from the horrors of the Second World War' were suddenly more receptive to the play's gruesomeness.<sup>62</sup>

The original press reviews for the 1955 Stratford production challenge this reception history however. Reviewers at the time expressed a total lack of emotional engagement in response to the production's highly stylised treatment of violence, and noted how audiences often found laughter the most natural response to its many cruel and spectacular deaths. Given the highly ambivalent nature of this initial reception, how was its subsequent reputation for topicality ever established? In fact Brook ultimately legitimised his claim by dismissing the early Stratford responses and pointing towards tour audiences on the European continent. He insisted that 'the most modern emotions – about violence, hatred, cruelty, pain' were more readily accepted as truth during the subsequent Iron Curtain tour in 1957.<sup>63</sup> Such an assertion is problematic. Not only is it difficult to corroborate given the ideal conditions that touring creates for partial

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<sup>60</sup> Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, p. 243.

<sup>61</sup> For recent discussion on how performance itself can be a way of legitimising a play on the margins of the canon, see, *The Quest for Cardenio: Shakespeare, Fletcher, Cervantes, and the Lost Play*, ed. by David Carnegie and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>62</sup> Michael D. Friedman and Alan Dessen, *Titus Andronicus: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 100; Beauman, p. 224.

reporting, but seems entirely self-serving if founded on a production that was deployed as a cultural intervention in the Cold War itself.

Brook's attempt at claiming *Titus Andronicus* for the Shakespeare canon was based on showing how it could work on stage. Helpfully, its very status as an obscure play gave the director a free hand in modifying the text and creating a successful piece of producer's theatre. Though this process of bringing the play to life was presented as a kind of deep textual analysis, Brook's relentless editing and elision of the play-script was an early example of what Alan Sinfield later recognised as standard Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) practice of claiming to respect 'scholarship' in order to 'authenticate the process' of reaching preconceived theatrical effects.<sup>64</sup> J. C. Trewin's early biography of Brook, which did much to establish *Titus Andronicus*' subsequent reception history, stated that 'its neo-Senecan horrors absorbed him as work for a theatre theatrical'.<sup>65</sup> Brook had long contemplated experimental ways of approaching the play, once with an all-black cast, or again with modernist sets designed by Jacob Epstein. His final staging confronted Stalinist cultural practice head on, by consciously building upon the kind of avant-garde work instigated by dissident Russian practitioners from the 1920s and 1930s:<sup>66</sup>

Descend[ing] in an unbroken line from the work of Komisarjevsky. I had leading actors such as he had never had, but it was the totality – the sound, the visual interpretation, everything interlocking, that made it happen'.<sup>67</sup>

Brook strove to control this interlocking spectacle at every level. As the original programme stated, the production was not only 'Directed by Peter Brook' and 'Designed by Peter Brook' but even featured 'Music by Peter Brook'.<sup>68</sup> Despite this highly

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<sup>64</sup> Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 199.

<sup>65</sup> Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 80.

<sup>66</sup> Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> Beauman, p. 224.

<sup>68</sup> Anon, *Souvenir Programme for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1955*, (London: Reinhardt and Evans, 1955), p. 7.

regulating approach, Brook felt able to claim he was uncovering some previously hidden 'truths' buried beneath the surface of the problematic play-text.<sup>69</sup> Characteristically, he stated that it 'began to yield its secrets' once he bypassed its 'gratuitous strokes of melodrama' and looked for its 'completeness'. In identifying a 'dark, flowing current' that 'rhythmically and logically related' the play's horrors, Brook claimed to have discovered a 'powerful' and 'barbaric ritual'.<sup>70</sup> Explaining the strange marionette quality adopted by the performers, Brook explained that stylistically he was aiming at creating a series of expressionist archetypes that presented the horrors of the play in 'a form that became unrealistic', 'transcended the anecdote' and became 'quite abstract and thus totally real'.<sup>71</sup> These modernist gestures towards a kind of universalism through expressionist abstraction were also evident on the level of staging, where the action flowed through and around the centrepiece of an unfolding metallic cylinder. Although similar to Okhlopkov's 'totalitarian baroque' in many regards, Brook's production underwrote the aesthetics of modern mechanistic slaughter with a notion of ancient ritual. It suggested that the barbarity spiralling through Shakespeare's bloodiest play was emanating from some inescapable trans-historical force that repeatedly plunged human societies back into cycles of political violence. In short, history in Brook's production was an anticipation of what Jan Kott would later come to theorise as the Grand Mechanism.

If such weighty connotations were picked up at all they were aimed more at Communist audiences and were barely noticed by the production's initial British theatregoers. In Stratford-upon-Avon and London the production caused a stir primarily because of its catalogue of brutalities, and the fact that it was the only remaining play in the First Folio that had never been staged at the SMT. Almost all of the British press followed the line taken by the *Daily Telegraph* that 'Stratford does Shakespeare's Horror

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<sup>69</sup> Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 187.

<sup>70</sup> Bauman, p. 224; Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 83.

<sup>71</sup> Anon, 'Search for a Hunger', *Encore*, July-August 1961, pp. 16-17; Jack E. Reese, 'The Formalisation of Horror in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 21:1 (1970), 77-84.

Comic'.<sup>72</sup> Under the headline 'Olivier in a Horror Comic' David Lewin wrote, 'Horror? At one point the audience was laughing'.<sup>73</sup> John Coe reviewing for the *Bristol Evening Post* under the headline 'Impressive - But Still Revolting' stated that:

Peter Brook is entitled to his opinion, but whether many of last night's capacity audience were in agreement must be doubtful [...] a modern audience's reaction to the four deaths in 20 lines with which the action culminated? Laughter, can be a pointed commentator.<sup>74</sup>

The British public evidently struggled to regard the play in the serious, tragic mode that Brook so strenuously intended and were more inclined to consider its violence preposterous. The ubiquitous threat of humour and derision vexed Brook greatly and he had to cut the text drastically so that 'his actors could let fly' without 'dread of mocking laughter'.<sup>75</sup> This attempt at tilting the play's problematic genre firmly in the direction of tragedy was viewed by many with scepticism:

How has Mr Brook come to this view? Simply, I maintain, by forcing the play, Procrustes-wise, to fit his opinion. For Mr. Brook has committed upon the text a butchery scarcely less severe than that suffered by most of the people in the play.<sup>76</sup>

Another critic detected a false note in Brook's depiction of violence as ubiquitous rather than emerging through the agency of any individual characters. He stated that Aaron:

instigator of all the bloodshed, revels in his vileness, too nauseatingly for Mr Brook's conception, and certain of his speeches have been cut. These cuts are small, but they obscure to some extent the fact that it is Aaron alone who sets the wheels of vengeance in motion.<sup>77</sup>

Where the problematic text could not be fully tamed Brook employed the 'protective atmospherics' of a *musique concrète* soundscape to ensure the desired continuity

<sup>72</sup> George W. Bishop, 'Stratford does Shakespeare's Horror Comic', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1955.

<sup>73</sup> David Lewin, 'Horror Comic', *Daily Express*, 15 August 1955.

<sup>74</sup> John Coe, 'Impressive - But Still Revolting', *Bristol Evening Post*, 17 August 1955.

<sup>75</sup> Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 83.

<sup>76</sup> Bernard Levin, 'Titus Review', *The Truth*, 26 August 1955.

<sup>77</sup> In Beauman, p. 224.

of tone.<sup>78</sup> These sound elements were so sensational that it led the actor Ian Holm to recollect that:

to be on his stage was to be in one of Hell's circles [...] the music, all plucked strings, single drum beats and eerie throbbing sounds. Just being on stage, even for a few minutes, was a strange, almost frightening experience, during which my senses were shockingly assaulted.<sup>79</sup>

*Musique concrète*, later to be termed radio-physics in much British commentary, would become a signature sound of the late 1950s and 1960s with Britain's most famous manifestation being the collective output of the BBC's Radio-phonic Workshop. Its basic technique was the recording and manipulation of found sounds to create challenging and atmospheric soundscapes. As recorded sounds can be sped up or slowed down to alter their pitch, it is possible to create distinct notes and hence compose conventional music out of unconventional noise.<sup>80</sup> The manner in which *Titus Andronicus* assailed audiences with a troublingly uncertain soundscape, and thus an entirely unique acoustic experience, was key to recalibrating the play as tragedy. Brook sought to create a score that was recognisably Roman yet also 'primitive and barbaric', suggesting his overall intention of evoking 'savagery' and inducing feelings of anxiety in theatregoers.<sup>81</sup> Under the headline 'Mr Brook Decided to Make his Own Primitive Roman Music' the director stated he 'couldn't think how to get from any composer I know, music primitive enough for my purposes'.<sup>82</sup> Although such sounds went on to establish their own conventions in Science Fiction from the mid 1950s onwards, these associations had yet to be fixed at the time of

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<sup>78</sup> Hugo Vickers, *Vivien Leigh* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988), p. 227.

<sup>79</sup> Ian Holm, *Acting My Life* (London: Corgi Books, 2004), p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> Reverb, filters and other analogue effects were also employed to fashion and shape these sounds further, with layering, overdubbing, and an early form of sequencing also facilitating composition. See, Louis Niebur *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radio-phonic Workshop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 64-119.

<sup>81</sup> Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 86.

<sup>82</sup> Francis Martin, 'Mr Brook Decided to Make his own Primitive Roman Music', *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, 27 August 1955.



Brook's *Titus Andronicus*, and were still fluid in meaning.<sup>83</sup> Commentators struggled to associate the sounds they were hearing to definite sources, with one describing the effect as 'an alarming mixture of an immense organ and a gigantic double-bass in a primitive blood-lust rhythm', or another experiencing 'a barbaric collage [...] sounding rather as if it were scored for Malayan nose-flute, deep sea tuba, and the Gorgon's eyeball'.<sup>84</sup> Overall, Brook's reliance on *musique concrète* signals how far he needed to push the production's performance effects in order to realise his interpretation, ensure that his 'truth' would be 'discovered', and that the 'latent absurdities of the play were skirted'.<sup>85</sup>

Despite little supporting evidence in the notices, J. C. Trewin's hagiographic account attempted to put the production's opening Stratford reception in its intended light, stating that:

One heard people, normally decorous, shouting at the pitch of their voices, hardly knowing that they did so, and denying it afterwards; a critic said it could have been the scene of a cup final.<sup>86</sup>

Such dramatic accounts helped to endorse Brook's claims of topicality and anecdotally assert the 'uncomplicated emotions' of 'violence, hatred, cruelty, fear' that the staging supposedly elicited from its audiences.<sup>87</sup> Trewin also stated that the production constituted 'a collector's rare primitive, its night [...] lanced with fire'. Starting with *Titus Andronicus*, the deployment of primitive tropes in service to the popular Cold War notion of the 'savage within' would become a signature of Brook's work over the coming decade.<sup>88</sup> Such notions occasionally led to racist readings while on tour in 1957, with one

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<sup>83</sup> Niebur, p. 97; Taylor, *Strange Sounds*, pp. 45-60; Ross Brown, *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 190-98.

<sup>84</sup> Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 87, p. 100.

<sup>85</sup> Dessen, p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> Trewin, *Peter Brook*, p. 82.

<sup>87</sup> Bauman, p. 224.

<sup>88</sup> The main examples are *King Lear* (1961), *The Tempest* (1963), the film adaptation of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1964), and Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade* (1965).

Austrian critic claiming that its nihilist gestures spoke to the contemporary drama of anti-colonial struggles:

The extraordinary figure of the moor [...] demonstrates African cruelty (who would not think of the present explosions of the North-African volcano) and a conscious wickedness of the modern kind: he is a genius of evil, a flower of the devil.<sup>89</sup>

Although such commentators seemed primed to respond readily to such imperialist gestures, most British ones didn't, and even fewer saw any connections with the Cold War in 1955. The only British reviewer who claimed the production possessed this kind of political relevance at the time was Harold Hobson, whose review for *The Sunday Times* even went so far as chastising his fellow critics for entirely failing to notice the production's topicality. Hobson stated that:

for post-Buchenwald generations the play's profligate brutalities no longer seemed comfortably remote, or ridiculous [...] The horrors in *Titus* [...] will not be wasted if they wake up the British stage to a sense of reality. Fifty or a hundred years ago the incidents in this play might well have seemed exaggerated. But now [...] there is absolutely nothing in the bleeding barbarity of *Titus* which would have astonished anyone at Buchenwald [...] *Titus* parallels exactly our own age [...] The audience which thinks that its sensationalism makes *Titus* unreal and absurd is probably weak in the stomach; it is undoubtedly weak in the head.<sup>90</sup>

With its evocation of Nazi atrocities, and startling accusation that post-war British theatregoers had become 'weak in the head', Hobson challenged audiences to not only take the threat of Soviet totalitarianism seriously, but to also take it with them to the theatre. The ideological and political intent underlying the production is clearly spelled

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<sup>89</sup> Eric G. Wickenburg, 'A Victory and a Lost Battle', [*Vienna Press*], 14 June 1957, in The National Archive (TNA): BW 1/235 Sir Laurence Olivier and Shakespeare Memorial Theatre's Tour of 'Titus Andronicus' to Paris, Venice, Belgrade, Zagreb, Vienna and Warsaw 1957-1958. All Viennese reviews of the tour are taken from the British Council's own English translations of the Austrian Press responses, held within the archive. Though dates are provided, many articles are not attributed to specific newspapers or periodicals. Where this occurs I have indicated these unattributed sources as [*Vienna Press*].

<sup>90</sup> Harold Hobson, 'A Modern Play', *The Sunday Times*, 21 August 1955.

out by Hobson's well-informed corrective that was influential in getting the production's intended reception back on track prior to touring.

### Reaching Eastern Europe

The struggle to get *Titus Andronicus* behind the Iron Curtain provides an illustrative example of how private individuals, cultural institutions, and arms-length governmental bodies operated in tandem in the fight against Communism in the mid 1950s. That *Titus Andronicus* didn't tour until 1957 is not so surprising considering that the SRD often had to improvise in order to wrong-foot Soviet censorship and its Cultural Ministry's practice of vetting each and every manifestations that Britain proposed sending. Given the financial constraints and anti-Communist policy direction that many British Council tours were now working under, Yugoslavia serves as an example of how state-private networks became key in aligning the necessary diplomatic, artistic, and financial elements needed to undertake cultural diplomacy successfully.

Yugoslavia had been targeted for cultural-diplomatic contact ever since Tito's break with Stalin in 1948. Early on Anthony Quayle offered 'the services of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre' for 'a short (five week) European tour' to immediately follow their 1951 season. Ultimately it became impossible for them to 'undertake a continental tour during the current financial year' causing 'considerable disappointment abroad, especially in Yugoslavia'.<sup>91</sup> In January 1952, the Foreign Office made a direct request 'for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre to visit Yugoslavia for one week' though the estimated cost of '£7000 for two weeks – one playing and one travelling' once again proved to be prohibitive. A practical solution for overcoming the constant financial hurdles was to make it:

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<sup>91</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 23 January 1951. The archives indicate that Quayle was vocal in chastising the organisation for its lack of impact abroad. The tour was meant to take place immediately after their 1951 season from October 27 to December 3 and include Paris, Vienna, Rome and Milan. TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 21 June 1951.

part of a larger tour to include visits to Italy, Austria, and Holland [...] the costs would be reduced proportionately i.e. from £1,733 per performance for one playing week to £336 for the longer period.<sup>92</sup>

In February 1955, the DAC secretary Stephen Thomas reviewed the situation, stating that sending a tour to Yugoslavia:

had been considered and investigated on many occasions and was, indeed, constantly under review, but [...] the funds available were hopelessly inadequate because the Yugoslavs were [...] only able to contribute a very small proportion of the cost.<sup>93</sup>

By the mid 1950s, much of the British Council's work in key European countries like West Germany had been taken over by the Foreign Office's CRD. This shift coincided with the formation of the SRC, signalling that the organization was working closely with the Foreign Office's Soviet concerns.<sup>94</sup> Thanks to the SRC's early success in re-routing Anglo-Soviet cultural relations away from Communist friendly British groups, Russia and Poland approached the SMT in July 1956 with invitations for them to visit at the end of that season. With this the DAC finally saw an opportunity for a tour that 'could be extended to Yugoslavia with little cost to the Council, and would fulfil a longstanding project'.<sup>95</sup> By October 1956, the DAC discussed the upcoming opening of the Theatre Des Nations in Paris, the actualisation of a scheme established by UNESCO's International Theatre Institute in 1946. As the original date coincided with a visit to Paris by the Queen, the organisers hoped an 'English company would open the season' and 'through the British Ambassador in Paris and French Ambassador in

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<sup>92</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 21 January 1952. Returning from a British Council lecture tour of Yugoslavia, Norman Marshall submitted a report concerned about 'a recent visit to Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana by an English Amateur company'. This led to a formal demand that the British Drama League 'be requested not to allow its name to be used by amateur companies playing in theatres normally used by professionals outside the United Kingdom'. Such sensitivities exemplify the DAC's conflicted role of simultaneously wanting (and presuming the right) to micro-manage Britain's theatrical image abroad, and its hamstrung financial position that most often led to complete inactivity.

<sup>93</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 9 February 1955.

<sup>94</sup> Since 1946 the CRD had traditionally been involved in countering Communist influence in International Youth movements and the National Union of Students in Britain. Lefty, p. 49.

<sup>95</sup> It is unclear whether this was a unilateral invitation from the Ministry of Culture that sought to circumnavigate the SRD and British Council. The intended Eastern European tour of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure* was also cancelled, this time due to the illness of Harry Andrews, one of its principal players. TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 25 July 1956.

London' the organisers 'approached Sir Laurence Olivier'.<sup>96</sup> Immediately at this point Brook's *Titus Andronicus* was mentioned.<sup>97</sup> The need to tour Eastern Europe as soon as possible was crucial as, according to Watanabe:

A closed document produced by the British Embassy dated October 1956, indicates just how encouraged they were by news of the 'extent to which the discussion on the arts in the satellite countries has run ahead of that in the Soviet Union', and a Soviet literary critic revealed overall 'Soviet anxiety' concerning this new climate. He describes, for example, that Soviet Socialist Realism, originally established in the 30s, was rejected by Polish and Yugoslav writers in the 1950s regarding it respectively as 'a weapon for destroying art' or as being 'antiquated', and internal forces in the USSR were in part responsible for revising it with a sense of 'full horror of Satellite deviation'.<sup>98</sup>

By January 1957 Olivier's tour 'was proposed [...] in the first instance for Eastern Europe, and the Council had approached the Foreign Office for an extra grant' which was awarded.<sup>99</sup> It is evident that financially speaking Paris, Vienna, and Venice were essential in mitigating the prohibitive costs of touring Eastern Europe, though in fact countries like Poland and Yugoslavia were primary political targets following the Soviet thaw. Financial circumstances permitting, the British Council was eager to support tours capable of reaching the Communist world.

### ***Titus Andronicus* 'Behind The Iron Curtain' (1957)**

The experience for those engaged in conducting Cultural Cold War programmes was complex, with the exchange constituting a tentative East-West network that took place around 'theatre' but also branched out into many other areas and activities. To consider how the movement of the people, goods, and ideas of the *Titus Andronicus* tour shaped

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<sup>96</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 24 October 1956.

<sup>97</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 24 October 1956.

<sup>98</sup> Watanabe, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 29 January 1957. According to Evelyn M. Williams, the Director of the Paris Festival, the British Council's Director of Drama was a key planner at this stage. Olivier insisted that the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre be given full credit and recognition for the production, as it was theirs originally.

the emotions and understanding of those involved, it is helpful to examine the available range of anecdotal accounts as instances of Cold War travelogue.

Most actors' accounts of the tour borrowed from the prevailing stock of Cold War metaphors that originated with western political planners and press coverage throughout the 1950s. From the range of available Cold War tropes (such as gamesmanship, force, disease, preaching, mirroring, and psychological terms), espionage and crusading constitute two of the most prevalent.<sup>100</sup> The company consciously saw themselves as embarking upon an ideological mission as the first English-speaking company that had 'ever penetrated inside the Iron Curtain'.<sup>101</sup> Although this was a spurious claim, the troupe embraced this aggressive and pioneering narrative when prior to departure they were primed to consider themselves as representing Britain through an act of important cultural diplomacy.<sup>102</sup> This sense of political purpose and intent was also coupled with pervasive hints of espionage and subterfuge. The company were advised to be mindful of their conduct in all Communist countries, to remember that in Yugoslavia 'Tito was above criticism', and to never discuss politics at a restaurant table in Poland in case the waiter happened to be a party agent.<sup>103</sup> Vignettes illustrating such apprehensive Cold War practices were common. In Belgrade the company was constantly escorted by the third-secretary to the British Embassy John Julius Norwich (son of the wartime Minister of Information Duff Cooper), whilst in Zagreb 'a terrible man' was specifically tasked to keep a eye on the tour's capricious leading lady, Vivien Leigh:

We called him 'Otto the agent'. He worked for the British Council. He was a kind of Hollywood gunman. He didn't have a revolver but he looked as if he did. After four days he was always saying 'Vivien,

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<sup>100</sup> Robert L. Ivie, 'Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War "Idealists"', in *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor and Ideology*, ed. by Martin J. Medhurst, and others (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pp. 103-27.

<sup>101</sup> Blakemore, p. 162; Coleman, p. 299; Holm, p. 59; Vickers, *Vivienne Leigh*, p. 241.

<sup>102</sup> While Peter Brook had taken *Hamlet* to Moscow in 1955, Theatre Workshop were also establishing unilateral cultural exchanges with the USSR and Eastern Bloc countries, and many smaller companies had also played Yugoslavia. The claim should be qualified that it was the first to be officially supported by the British Council and so, formally recognised and endorsed by the British Government.

<sup>103</sup> Vickers, *Vivienne Leigh*, p. 244.

I love you'. He fell madly in love with her. But she wrangled the man so much. He must have lost two stone. He was a gibbering wreck. He came out with us every night and it was serious.<sup>104</sup>

As a way of mitigating such melodramatic tensions, many actors preferred to view their journey across the Eastern Bloc as a glamorous personal adventure. Crossing the frontier into Yugoslavia at Trieste aboard the Simplon-Orient Express, Frank Thring epitomised this spirit when leaning out of the carriage window yelling 'The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre! By land, sea and yak!' The company also found that staying in 'an enormous turn of the century hotel' run 'with exceptional inefficiency by the state' helped maintain the notion that they were simply undertaking an unconventional vacation.<sup>105</sup> Ian Holm summarised the contradictory feelings that the touring experience evoked when stating that it was 'an expedition' that had 'the whiff of unreality about it', a 'sort of holiday from real life'.<sup>106</sup>

Humour frequently helped to leaven the political and cultural tensions that the actors felt their own presence evoked. Language problems bred comic anecdotes such as the company being mistaken as a delegation of post-office workers. Holm felt that the stressful elements of the tour were mediated by being:

glimpsed through a peculiarly English lens, grim fact eased by the burlesque of our expedition, the flying Oliviers and their performing troupe, Terence Greenridge and his Bananas, and of course the certain knowledge that we would soon turn round and return home. We were sedated against experience of the full-blown austerity by circumstances and temperament, moments of starkness being counterbalanced by instants of humour or flashes of the absurd, many of these deliberately sought in a very English way. Despite all the eye-opening and the affecting scenes of hardship, I was keen to travel back to Stratford.<sup>107</sup>

Holm acknowledged uneasiness at playing the role of 'witness' to Eastern Europe's plight and as a result was unwilling to be drawn into easy conclusions. Although he

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<sup>104</sup> Vickers, *Vivienne Leigh*, p. 245.

<sup>105</sup> Holm, p. 60.

<sup>106</sup> Holm, p. 61.

<sup>107</sup> Holm, pp. 60-61.

recorded the momentary flash of numerous ‘eye-opening and affecting scenes’ such as seeing ‘elderly, dignified Polish men being overwhelmed at the apparent luxury of a sticky bun’ or travelling through ‘reverberating underground tunnels which had hosted shooting matches and executions only a few years before’, he readily admitted the limits of his touristic perspective. Rather than understanding Poland’s plight, Holm’s account suggests that many actors felt like spectators, shielded from the experience with thoughts of returning home.<sup>108</sup>

Such reactions are a reminder that many touring actors were simply fulfilling a contract of employment, and maintained a personal distance from the broader cultural-political agenda of the work they were undertaking. The ‘instances of humour’ and ‘flashes of the absurd’ were no doubt an effective means for dealing with the dissonance of actually being behind the ‘Iron Curtain’ and measuring the places visited against the prejudices and misconceptions that the Western actors’ invariably brought over with them. While one performer concluded that Belgrade was merely ‘a grey concrete city with badly dressed people walking’ streets that bore ‘no sign of a prosperous middle class’, Michael Blakemore stated more reflectively that:

the propaganda of the Cold War almost led one to believe that Technicolor would give way to black and white as you crossed the border [...] it was interesting to see people enjoying their lives in bars, restaurants and modest night spots despite having their acquisitive instincts tempered. Whatever was wrong with it, Tito’s Yugoslavia was not Communist Russia.<sup>109</sup>

In contrast to Holm, Blakemore’s account follows more in the tradition of anti-conquest modes of travel writing, deliberately portraying himself as going strenuously out of his way to establish knowledge and understanding of the people and societies through

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<sup>108</sup> Holm, pp. 59-61.

<sup>109</sup> Blakemore, p. 164; Vickers, *Vivienne Leigh*, p. 244.



which he passes, often in order to help or assist them in some way.<sup>110</sup> Though well intended, such wide-eyed innocence also had its limitations. In Poland for instance, though the weight of recent history appeared to be abundantly in evidence all around, Blakemore found it difficult to engage in the experience in the meaningful way that his account suggests he desired. When confronted with Stalin's 'hideous Palace of Culture' he reaches for hackneyed Cold War phrases such as stating that it 'loomed over the city about as invitingly as the watchtower of a prison camp'.<sup>111</sup> The pressure to resort to available clichés served the tour's mission well. In order to comprehend the signifiers of Nazi occupation or Sovietisation, the actors ultimately found themselves gesturing back towards the *Titus Andronicus* production they were performing:

Nowhere did the grim events of the play seem more plausible than they did in Poland. Every person one met had some extraordinary and horrific tale to tell [...] These were commonplace experiences. In a tentative, almost apologetic way our Polish hosts wanted us to know a little of what they had been through.<sup>112</sup>

Faced with the complex historical, social, and political realities of Communist Europe, the performers ultimately took refuge in their work. *Titus Andronicus* provided the optic through which the countries visited were measured and apprehended. The comforting sense of the theatre being a transferable space where they belonged and had a cultural mission to undertake became increasingly important as the tour progressed. Such a refuge was both temporary and porous however. Actors naturally craved a positive response from their audiences and vague notions of success or popularity became ensnared in the play's ideological formation. Positive audience reactions became a means for asserting the tour's claim to political relevance, or the sense that its supposed universality was being verified.

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<sup>110</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), pp. 37-83. Although Pratt concentrates of the travel writing of an earlier period, eighteenth and nineteenth-century tropes persisted into the 1950s, often being reworked as irony and self-depreciation.

<sup>111</sup> Blakemore, p. 170.

<sup>112</sup> Blakemore, p. 169.

Not only was this barometer of audience enjoyment utterly unreliable in political terms, it also varied enormously from country to country. After warm accolades in Paris, an indifferent reception in Vienna made the company feel the audience's 'apathy from the moment the curtain rose'.<sup>113</sup> Consequently, the grateful return to some genuine appreciation in Belgrade was given an exaggerated political spin:

Here the intensity of goodwill was a coded but unmistakable message: we are your friends, and only the politicians and the military shake their fists at one another [...] it was very moving, one of those occasions when what people are permitted to express is fed and intensified by what they are not. You felt this event would resonate far beyond the walls of the theatre.<sup>114</sup>

Another easy interpretation available to the British visitors, and picked up in Brook's later claims, was to construct a contrast between Western apathy and Eastern enthusiasm and appreciation of the production's topicality. As an echo of its attempts to galvanise anti-Communist sentiment in Britain in 1955, such sweeping claims are doubtful, though they do evidence how far the tour's ideological constitution went in influencing the actor's experiences of it. The prevailing sense that on a good night, art could address and even transcend international tensions was illustrative of the imprecision of the political gesture the production was making overall.

Although the Viennese responded positively to the principal actors and Brook's directorial handling, the choice of play was widely questioned in Austria. The theatre critic Hans Weigel felt it was 'an example of an ideal Shakespeare interpretation applied to an unsuitable object' and that the audience only 'tolerated the play as a pretext for meeting Shakespeare performed by Olivier and his English company'.<sup>115</sup> The Austrian reviewers responded critically to both the production's assertion of humanity's innate savagery and more incisively, the political motivations behind touring such a nihilistic

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<sup>113</sup> Blakemore, p. 161.

<sup>114</sup> Blakemore, p. 165.

<sup>115</sup> Hans Weigel, 'Titus Review', [*Vienna Press*], 13 June 1957. The British Council seemed particularly concerned about the tour's reception in Vienna, compiling and then translating many of the original notices for further circulation, analysis, and discussion back in London.

vision in the first place. Unexpectedly then, the opening of Friedrich Heer's review 'A Moment in History in the Theatre' couldn't have seemed closer to Brook's intentions:

Hatred, wickedness, grief, revenge and horror, brought down to their primary form, rule the stage. A passionate, barbaric and archaic spirit rules it [...] The action rolls off as if it were following some sinister and solemn ritual full of pathos surging from mystical depths [...] accompanied by the sinister deep echoes of a remote human past [...] that this play is able to move us is greatly due to the fascination of its scenery and accompanying sounds.<sup>116</sup>

Following this however, Heer pins Brook's assertion of universal human savagery back onto the particularity of the British themselves, especially their imperial character:

[in] this consonance of the ancient and the most modern [...] Shakespeare is recreated with the archaic elements present to his day and to his mind (what cruelty, barbarity, calmness and grandeur there are in this mentality of the British: the development from the Battle of Hastings to Cecil Rhodes).<sup>117</sup>

Although acknowledging receipt of the message that we should be 'horrified at what will befall us if we decay into those primary elements, into the chaos still existent in us' he retorts that 'the British Council to which we owe the Vienna visit [...] could not have found a more effective and fascinating propaganda for modern British world power'.<sup>118</sup>

In fact many Austrian critics understood, exposed, and questioned the state-ideological intention behind this particular visit of British Shakespeare to their country:

According to their own statement the English company is touring [...] because the play is seldom performed and practically unknown abroad [...] all this was admirably bridged over by the producer. But it could not make us get over the horror which such atrocities, fundamentally bare of any human feeling, create in us. Art triumphed, but England lost a battle by this performance. The frenetic, unparalleled and more than well deserved applause could not make us overlook the fact that the question as to what had been played here, had to be put [...] It testifies to an incredible cruelty which somehow falls back upon the English who not only consider a drama like this part of their national treasure, but who so much approve of it that they even go touring with it.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Friedrich Heer, 'A Moment in History in the Theatre', [*Vienna Press*], 22 June 1957.

<sup>117</sup> Heer.

<sup>118</sup> Heer.

<sup>119</sup> Anon, 'Sir Laurence Olivier in the Burgtheater', *Die Fresse*, 14 June 1957.

Austria constituted a kind of crisis in Blakemore's personal account of the tour. Pushing some fellow Austrian actors to voice their specific objections to the production, he recounts how 'one of them recalled with a faint smile':

'We don't do that anymore,'[...]  
 'What?' I asked.  
 'Roll our R's' he replied [...] 'You still do that in England? We stopped doing that in the 'Twenties'.<sup>120</sup>

Blakemore found the experience of seeing his company's work from other professionals' perspectives jarring:

I had seen the work of these actors and their judgment was not something I could easily dismiss; after all, they belonged to what was at that time the most sophisticated theatrical culture in Europe [...] Frank Thring, who played Saturninus with the villainous grimacing of a silent-movie actor. What must they have made of him? [...] my faith in the production had been shaken, and this betrayal had come as much from within as without [...] enough to topple the edifice of artistic belief.<sup>121</sup>

Although this moment of aporia and self-doubt focused on the comparative weakness of Britain's national theatrical culture, Blakemore does not seem to dwell on the hypocrisies and contradictions of the tour's ideological programme overall, despite the fact that such points were being made in the local press.

The Foreign Office style of diplomacy that chiefly targeted local decision-making elites was very much still in evidence in the mid-1950s. British Embassy staff and the British Council Regional Representatives were in the habit of measuring a production's success by the reactions reflected in the social elites they moved amongst. 'Popular enthusiasm' for example, 'was assumed to be equalled by that of the Yugoslav Government, many important members of which were seen at the theatre on two or three successive evenings'.<sup>122</sup> Socialising was such an important aspect of cultural diplomacy on British Council tours that Olivier had made the entire male cast purchase

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<sup>120</sup> Blakemore, pp. 168-69.

<sup>121</sup> Blakemore, p. 169.

<sup>122</sup> TNA: BW 1/436, 14 July 1957.

dinner jackets before the tour, reassuring everyone that they would be getting good value out of them.<sup>123</sup> Such diplomatic protocols reached their zenith in Belgrade when Marshall Tito 'and three of the four vice-presidents and their wives' were present, with Tito inviting 'the four principals together with Mr and Mrs Peter Brook to his box in the interval to offer his congratulations'.<sup>124</sup> Embassy reports were enthused by the success of this closing night, where:

about five-hundred people were offered a lavish supper, with dancing to follow, on a scale that has, I think, seldom been known at any government function below the White Palace level.<sup>125</sup>

On a commercial level, the British Embassy in Belgrade were particularly pleased that anticipation had been 'steadily rising' though 'ridiculously few' tickets were available to the general public once 'the demands of the Yugoslav Government and Party officials, members of the local theatres, opera and ballet, and representatives of the press as well as the Diplomatic Corps, the Embassy and the British Council' had all been met:

By the last days of May the black market price of a thousand-dinar ticket had risen to eight or nine thousand dinars. Advance publicity presented no problems; all sections of the press were avid for information and photographs [...] the first classified advertisements offering high-prices for tickets ever to appear in the history of the Yugoslav press.<sup>126</sup>

The tour's appeal to local elites and embodiment of the sharp edge of capitalist supply and demand helped to chip away at the Communist state's veneer of equality. Beyond ticket receipts the tour managed to generate its own political economy by providing additional cultural activities. As compensation for the lack of available tickets the company made altruistic visits, with Leigh and Olivier giving unannounced readings in the great hall of the University of Belgrade 'for students only'. Although Olivier and

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<sup>123</sup> Coleman, p. 241.

<sup>124</sup> TNA: BW 120/1, DAC Minutes 1939-1957, 9 July 1957.

<sup>125</sup> TNA: BW 1/436, 14 July 1957.

<sup>126</sup> TNA: BW 1/436, 14 July 1957.

Leigh's performance took on an 'impromptu nature' that reflected 'a noticeable lack of polish', it was felt that this:

served only to emphasise their anxiety not to disappoint the students who appreciated their kindness all the more. The programme itself was, to say the least, representative. It consisted of some of the most famous speeches of Shakespeare, an extract from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and, as a *tour de force*, a song-and-dance routine by Sir Laurence from his recent London performance in *The Entertainer*.<sup>127</sup>

This kind of staged philanthropy would become a cultural-diplomatic staple, with the later visits of the Old Vic's tour of *Hamlet* in 1958 and Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* in 1960 also providing the same 'impromptu' performances for University students lacking the money, status, or connections to secure theatre tickets for themselves.<sup>128</sup>

Although the tour's scale and ambition made it difficult to financially break even, it helped establish useful economic links for Britain's entertainment industry that would be developed in future. Leigh and Olivier's visit to the Film Workers of Yugoslavia was one indicator of how the tour helped open up such commercial opportunities. In terms of movie celebrity endorsement, Leigh was much more valuable than Olivier. Few people in Poland or Yugoslavia had even heard of Olivier though Leigh enjoyed massive international celebrity due to her role in the movie adaptation of *Gone With the Wind* (1939), a film that moviegoers throughout the world identified with in terms of personal struggle and survival during the war years.<sup>129</sup> Despite playing the slight, supporting role of Lavinia, Leigh received top billing in all advertisements. Reproducing scenes from the Australia and New Zealand Commonwealth Tour of 1948, large crowds gathered outside theatres and 'shouted for Scarlett'.<sup>130</sup> Leigh's movie-star profile continued to be a certain draw for audiences who were largely indifferent to Shakespeare.

<sup>127</sup> TNA: BW 1/436, 14 July 1957.

<sup>128</sup> Judi Dench, *And Furthermore* (London: Pheonix Press, 2010), pp. 23-27.

<sup>129</sup> Steve Wilson, *The Making of Gone With The Wind* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>130</sup> Coleman, p. 299.

Although it shared little history with Britain regarding Shakespeare studies, the Yugoslav film industry was undergoing enormous growth at the time of Olivier and Leigh's visit and was on course to become one of the strongest in Europe.<sup>131</sup> Due to the country's experiment of allowing socialist market mechanisms within its centralised economy, the period witnessed soaring growth in both the production and consumption of cinema. In decisive Cold War terms this signalled a significant loss of Soviet influence as Yugoslavia became more domestic and Western oriented. Between 1945 and 1950, 220 films were imported to Yugoslavia from the USSR with only 30 coming from the United States. From 1951 to 1960, US film imports rose to 579 while the USSR's dropped to a mere 97. The yearly production of Yugoslav films more than doubled between 1955 and 1960. Yugoslavia has been in 'coequal financial and artistic feature film production' with foreign studios since 1954 with many being Western European. This took place at a time when cinema admissions for domestically produced films rose from 5,656,000 to 17,133,000 between 1951 and 1960. For foreign films the same activity grew from 57,875,000 in 1951 to 112,991,000.<sup>132</sup> This revolution in the Yugoslav film industry was part of a wider rupture in the Soviet cultural sphere at the time, as many Communist-Socialist states were struggling to free their creative industries from the imposition of Socialist Realism. This creative defiance against Moscow-dictated cultural policy was taking place across much of the Eastern Bloc during Khrushchev's thaw with Shakespeare playing its part, especially in Poland.<sup>133</sup>

### **Making Shakespeare Contemporary: The Legacy of the *Titus Andronicus* Tour**

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<sup>131</sup> In the mid-to-late 1950s, Yugoslav film production 'approximated world norms' while 'domestic films found an export market and received their first prizes at international film festivals'. Daniel J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience 1945-2001* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 38.

<sup>132</sup> Goulding, p. 37.

<sup>133</sup> Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Goulding, p. 38.

Peter Brook and Jan Kott met on the very last night of the *Titus Andronicus* tour in Poland. Brook's preface to the English language edition of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* recalls the dramatic circumstances of their first meeting in a Warsaw nightclub, involving embroilment with the local police over the arrest of a young Polish actress:

Here we have a man writing about Shakespeare's attitude to life from direct experience. Kott is undoubtedly the only writer on Elizabethan matters who assumes without question that every one of his readers will at some point of other have been woken by the police in the middle of the night.<sup>134</sup>

For British readers encountering Kott for the first time such biographical snippets were clearly intended to frame and validate his brand of political Shakespeare, especially its claimed insights into oppressive state rule and the way in which Shakespeare could speak on tyranny and totalitarianism across both national and temporal borders. Brook's introduction even goes so far as claiming that 'Kott is an Elizabethan' and that Poland:

has come closest to the tumult, the danger, the intensity, the imaginativeness and the daily involvement with the social process that made life so horrible, subtle and ecstatic to an Elizabethan. So it is quite naturally up to a Pole to point us the way.<sup>135</sup>

Together Brook's and Martin Esslin's introductions to *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* provide an over-determined account of Kott's lived experience under Communism, locating him as not only the perfect insider able to validate their own critical view of the Communist world but also bestowing Shakespearian texts with penetrating insight. Kott's work on Shakespeare helped undermine Communist ideology and gave early-1960s British Shakespeare a sense of social relevance and political urgency.

Esslin makes the association between the superpower's ideological antagonism and Shakespeare's ability to explain the human dramas lived within it explicit. He claims that after the 'astonishing liberation movement of October 1956' Poland offered 'the urgency, the burning topicality, and the overwhelming emotional intensity' of a

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<sup>134</sup> Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 1.

<sup>135</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 2.



‘communion with kindred spirits who have faced similarly extreme situations’.<sup>136</sup> Esslin’s gloss on Kott’s controlling notion of the Grand Mechanism is strikingly applicable to the competing teleological-cyclical debate on history at the heart of Brook’s *Titus Andronicus*:

Marxists in contemporary Eastern Europe are trained to look at the world as a manifestation of the historical process working itself out towards a preordained goal. In the last twenty years they have learned the violence and mutability of history, but they have also learned to view the attainment of preordained goals with healthy scepticism. In Shakespeare they can find the historical process itself, stark, violent, and relentless, but totally free of any vulgar teleological conception, a great wheel of power, endlessly revolving.<sup>137</sup>

By the time Brook went on to direct his acclaimed production of *King Lear* in 1962 Kott would be starting his new life as an émigré writer living in Brook’s London apartment from where he provided assistance. Given the lengths that Brook and Esslin went to in portraying Kott as the embodiment of unfolding Elizabethan-style intrigues lived behind the Iron Curtain, it seems imperative to revisit Kott’s intellectual and political biography in the light of the visiting *Titus Andronicus* production. We should consider to what extent the Cultural Cold War influenced his life and work, as well as identifying what Brook stood to gain from the exchange.

Jan Kott started reading Shakespeare when serving in the Polish resistance during the Second World War, stating that he was ‘fascinated by the idea of great turning points in history’ because during the war ‘they alone offered hope’.<sup>138</sup> He felt that ‘in times of terror, human dramas – even the most common and universal – somehow became final and are purified of anything accidental’.<sup>139</sup> As these notions of ‘typicality’ suggest, Kott was reading Georg Lukács at the time and ‘from then on’ for ‘more than ten years’, Kott

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<sup>136</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, pp. 14–17.

<sup>137</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 19.

<sup>138</sup> Jan Kott, *Still Alive: An Autobiographical Essay* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 187.

<sup>139</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 165.

‘remained under his spell, for better and for worse’.<sup>140</sup> Lukács’s conception of ‘typical characters under typical circumstances’ seemed to constitute ‘a magical formula’:

Lukács is dry but makes history transparent in texts. The drama of the protagonists is the drama of history – sometimes even the tragedy of history. That is what I learned from Lukács. I [then] showed the workings of the Grand Mechanism in Shakespeare’s history plays.<sup>141</sup>

As Fredric Jameson summarises it, Lukács’s general notion of realism is ‘dependent on the possibility of access to the forces of change in a given moment of history’.<sup>142</sup> This seems a far remove from Kott’s later theory however. Apart from the important fact that Lukács is primarily concerned with the nineteenth-century novel and Kott with Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, Kott’s more modernist approach diminished the historical particularity of the people and events portrayed in Shakespeare’s plays, reducing them into archetypes, and the kind of allegorical figures that could support his more cyclical and trans-historical perspective.<sup>143</sup>

Although Kott’s schooling in Marxist thinking would have provided him with the basis for a materialist reading of Shakespeare, his subsequent experience of life lived under Stalinism seems to have profoundly coloured the development of his thinking. In Communist Poland following the war, as well as becoming co-founder of the Institute of Literary Research and holding three professorships, Kott became co-editor of *Forge* magazine and was tasked with managing the arrival of Socialist Realist literature from Moscow.<sup>144</sup> As one of Poland’s leading literary tsars, Kott earned a reputation for being a strict and orthodox member of the Party’s Moscow-dictated cultural apparatus. Many

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<sup>140</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 187.

<sup>141</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 188.

<sup>142</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 80.

<sup>143</sup> For a detailed account of Lukács’ ideas on Realism, see Jameson, pp. 191-205. See also, Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 75-145. Robert Weimann contends that the Socialist Realist view of Shakespeare emerged from the textual tradition of Shakespeare scholarship in the nineteenth century, rather than from any stage-centred performance history. See Robert Weimann ‘Ideology and Performance in East German Versions of Shakespeare’, in *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism*, pp. 328-48 (p. 328-31).

<sup>144</sup> Michael Kustow, ‘Jan Kott: An Obituary’, *The Guardian*, 10 January 2002.

Poles never forgive him for a series of actions taken around that time, such as proscribing Joseph Conrad's writing and publicly attacking Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind* (1953). Looking back over his period of zealous Party orthodoxy, Kott stated that he had:

great difficulty recognising myself in those first two years after the war. And still more trouble judging myself [...] We were sure we would change history by what we wrote. We were sure of history as though it belonged to us. It was the same old 'Hegelian sting' but we did not yet know that term and it was rather we who were biting history than the other way around.<sup>145</sup>

Concerning the staff at *Forge* magazine, he felt they were:

quite well aware [...] that socialist realism and Zhdanovism meant the death of all creativity. The problem was how to open the way to socialist realism – for after all, that was what we were doing – and yet at the same time somehow get free of it. In other words, how to put one's neck in a noose and convince others to do so – but prevent the noose from tightening.<sup>146</sup>

Kott's conscious drift from the Communist Party started in January 1953 due in part to the realisation that most of his wartime comrades had disappeared in the latest round of purges, and that his own life was in jeopardy during the 'doctor's plot' prior to Stalin's death.<sup>147</sup> In terms of literary culture, the arrival of the first Socialist Realist production novels 'of the worst, most schematic variety [...] portraying Stakhanovite heroes surpassing work quotas many times over without knowing any temptation of body and soul' was more than Kott could stomach.<sup>148</sup> One obituary writer summarised that Kott had 'fought for socialist realism in literature right up to the point when the first socialist realist books appeared'.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, pp. 182-83.

<sup>146</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 186.

<sup>147</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 161. On the Eastern Bloc purges at the time see, Jonathan Brent and Vladimir P. Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Doctor's Plot* (London: John Murray, 2004); Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1986), pp. 502-04.

<sup>148</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 190.

<sup>149</sup> Eric Pace, 'Jan Kott 87, Critic and Shakespeare Scholar', *New York Times*, 4 January 2002.

In 1956, at Jean-Paul Sartre's invitation, Kott put together an anthology of texts for a special issue of *Les Temps Modernes* on changes in Polish Socialism. Although de-Stalinisation began after the Soviet Communist Party's Twentieth Congress in February 1956 Kott formally resigned from the Polish Communist Party in November 1957 after the party's refusal, despite the 'thaw', to allow the publication of a new literary monthly to be titled *Europa*.<sup>150</sup> Prior to resigning Kott had already taken steps towards betraying his party in fact. On frequent visits to Paris and once in Munich, Kott met up with Jan Nowak of Radio Free Europe to tell him 'in as much detail' as he could 'what was going on in the party':<sup>151</sup>

Even now I am unable to explain exactly why I did that [...] Nowak and I were separated by our political past and our outlook on the future. I was on the other side and would remain so for quite some time yet. But even then I could clearly see that [...] Radio Free Europe was an ally and a support.<sup>152</sup>

Although Kott presents his reasons for betraying the Polish Communist Party as a mystery even to himself, it is implied as being a patriotic, pro-European, and anti-Soviet decision founded on hope for increased Polish independence within the Communist bloc. Given his subsequent émigré status in the UK and then the US, it should also be noted that in its support of Radio Free Europe, Britain was instrumental in helping to organise the transfer of Soviet and Eastern-European defectors to the West at the time.<sup>153</sup>

In the last days of September 1956, Roman Zawistowski's production of *Hamlet* (then dubbed the 'Hamlet of the Polish October') made a great impression on Kott, leading to a performance review entitled 'Hamlet after the Twentieth Party Convention'. He saw the show as a 'thoroughly political drama' that subversively reflected the events

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<sup>150</sup> Shore, p. 309.

<sup>151</sup> Jan Nowak, *Courier From Warsaw* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982); Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 209.

<sup>152</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 220.

<sup>153</sup> Defty, p. 171.

and attitudes of the time.<sup>154</sup> Similarly to Okhlopkov's 1955 production in Moscow, the fundamental conceit that 'Denmark is a prison' demonstrated the ways in which Shakespeare could provide oblique criticism of Soviet rule. By the time Brook's touring *Titus Andronicus* played Warsaw from 18 to 21 June, Kott already had two volumes of his theatre reviews published. 'The Kings', the essay that sets out Kott's key notion of the Grand Mechanism in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* was published in Polish in November 1957, a couple of months following his review of *Titus Andronicus* and subsequent meeting with Brook.

Kott's original piece on the visiting *Titus Andronicus* production appeared in *Cultural Review* under the title 'Shakespeare Cruel and True'. The review was careful not to draw close attention to the ways in which the production criticised Communist ideology, focusing instead on the strengths of the production's formal qualities and especially the influence of film upon its staging. With the film adaptation of *Henry V* and *Richard III* in mind, Kott claimed that Olivier was the first 'to show the true Shakespeare convincingly' because 'the living Shakespeare of our time has been presented, first and foremost in film [...] it is the return to the true Shakespeare in the theatre through the experience of film that amazes us most'.<sup>155</sup> He lauded the cinematic quality in Brook's production, whose 'scenes are composed like film shots and follow each other like film sequences'.<sup>156</sup> The enthused language and rapturous terms that Kott employs throughout suggests a kind of conversion narrative. It is noticeable that he employs many hagiographic phrases reminiscent of Brook's own tendency towards sweeping claims. He states for instance that 'Shakespeare is truer than life' and that Olivier's films have achieved some 'super-truth more than any theatre has'.<sup>157</sup> Proof that Shakespeare correlates with contemporary concerns is drawn from the broadest of assertions; that 'he

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<sup>154</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 9.

<sup>155</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 347.

<sup>156</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 348.

<sup>157</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 348.

is violent, cruel and brutal; earthly and hellish' and that his work 'evokes terror as well as dreams and poetry'. The piece concludes giddily that Shakespeare 'is most true and improbable, dramatic and passionate, rational and mad'.<sup>158</sup>

A decisive commitment towards the more trans-historical, apolitical, and archetypal features of modernism is clearly evident in 'Shakespeare Cruel and True'. Any sense of the historical particularity and constructed-ness of the Shakespearian text itself is absent. The article displays a reverential tone on how the British visitors were able to mine the text for relevance, thus confirming both it and themselves as inheritors and repositories of some transcendent wisdom. Quayle and Olivier both seemed to 'possess a rich renaissance quality of gesture, voice and a dramatic intensity'.<sup>159</sup> Although the gesture towards cinema as a contemporary form able to provide new interpretations is progressive, the notion that it provides access to the 'real' Shakespeare is mystifying.

Kott's lauding of the impact of such modernist techniques upon stage practice hints at the influence of Brecht, perhaps demonstrating some affinity with the dramatist's long defence of modernist experimentation within Marxist aesthetics. Although a perennial debate going back to the 1930s, in an essay first published in 1954 Brecht had written:

Tying a great conception like Realism to a few names is dangerous, however famous they may be, and so is the bundling together of a few forms to make a universal-applicable creative method, even if those forms are useful in themselves. Literary forms have to be checked against reality, not against aesthetics – even realist aesthetics. There are many ways of suppressing truth and many ways of stating it.<sup>160</sup>

Although careful not to explicitly identify his adversary, Brecht's polemic was responding to a series of articles and essays critiquing Lukács' central ideas on Realism. It was

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<sup>158</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, pp. 352-53.

<sup>159</sup> Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, pp. 352-53.

<sup>160</sup> 'The Popular and the Realistic', in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 107-15 (p. 114).

motivated in part by Brecht's understanding of the restrictive potential of state-legislated Social Realism, the kind of cultural programme that Kott had helped usher in before subsequently renouncing it.<sup>161</sup> The political character and motivation behind Brecht's work and Brook's could not have been further apart. Brecht's use of modernist and expressionist techniques was selective, experimental, and driven by a desire to accentuate existing historical social conflicts in order to galvanise his audience into action outside of the theatre.<sup>162</sup> Brook's production on the other hand, aimed at achieving some kind of orchestrated reconciliation through tragic catharsis whilst also propagating a profoundly quietist message.

Recent commentators such as Zofia Sawicka, claim that *Titus Andronicus* had such an impact on the Polish academic because it was:

the first time since the war [that] Kott saw a Shakespearean play not contaminated by any ideology, not burdened with Stalinist experience, produced far away from the political reality known to him. And at the same time alive and moving, unexpectedly brutal and first of all — contemporary.<sup>163</sup>

Sawicka viewed the experience as 'a catalyst' which helped to take Kott out of the cycle of seeing Shakespeare's plays 'exclusively through the prism of totalitarian experiences'.<sup>164</sup> The suggestion of a neat alignment between Brook and Kott's ideas is a common view though, as a previously senior member of the Polish Communist Party's cultural apparatus providing intelligence to the West, it is doubtful that Kott would have viewed the British touring production as being free of ideological intent. It is easier to understand Kott's ideas as being formed within the context of compromised official responses to profound cultural changes within Poland following the death of Stalin. In

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<sup>161</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Against Georg Lukács', in Theodor Adorno et al, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1977), pp. 68-85.

<sup>162</sup> Lunn, p. 90.

<sup>163</sup> Zofia Sawicka, 'Jan Kott: The Road to Shakespeare', *Culture.pl* (March 2009), <<http://culture.pl/en/article/jan-kott-the-road-to-shakespeare>> [Accessed 10 May 2015].

<sup>164</sup> Sawicka, p. 1.

truth, highly allegorical interpretations of Shakespeare that provided oblique criticism of state abuse within the Soviet sphere were a common and defining feature of the time.<sup>165</sup> The early Khrushchev era gave licence to this type of unorthodoxy, one that Stalin would never have tolerated and that British information services were only too happy to exploit. Arguably the dissenting political Shakespeare that Kott saw on the stage in 1950s Poland represented a 'radical' gesture unthreatening enough to be permitted by the apprehensive rulers in power at the time. Krystyna Skuszkanka's production of *Measure for Measure* in 1956 illustrates how Shakespeare became a channel for expressing a limited degree of dissent.<sup>166</sup> Skuszkanka's interpretation seemed to have constituted a bold gesture indeed, as it drew public attention to the dilemma of recognisable individuals caught within a political system that abjured personal rights. However, she later recalled that many Communist Party officials came to see the production in order to symbolically display 'their identification' with the production's 'ideological subversion within the unquestionable Polish Communist Party status quo'. Following significant and far-reaching political events such as the brutal confrontation between the Poznan workers and the army, such theatre attendance simply 'assisted in entrenching' the Communist regime into the new political settlement, one that would return again to oppressive cultural orthodoxy in due course.<sup>167</sup>

We should conclude by recognising that the *Titus Andronicus* tour not only helped shape Kott's ideas but also provided him with British contacts eager and willing to bring him to the UK and the US. What then was the legacy of Kott's writing in the West? In what ways was it instrumental in reinvigorating Britain's Shakespeare industry? As their introductions to *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* show, Kott played the role of the authentic

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<sup>165</sup> Krytyna Kujawska Courtney, 'Celebrating Shakespeare under the Communist Regime in Poland', in *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe*, pp. 23-35.

<sup>166</sup> Krytyna Kujawska Courtney, 'Krystyna Skuszkanka's Shakespeare of Political Allusions and Metaphors in Communist Poland', in *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism*, pp. 228-45.

<sup>167</sup> Courtney, 'Krystyna Skuszkanka's Shakespeare of Political Allusions and Metaphors in Communist Poland', in *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism*, p. 235.



‘other’ whose noble suffering could be gazed at and appropriated by western cultural tourists such as Brook, Esslin, and their intended English-language readers. Kott’s essays furnished Brook with ‘evidence’ of Shakespeare’s extraordinary relevance and universal insight into the iniquities of Communist rule. It also provided independent academic validation of the producer’s programme of mining Shakespearian texts for the ‘discovery’ of hidden ‘truths’ buried beneath the surface. Such political insight into the failures of Communism could be imported back to an initially sceptical British public. The exact dynamics of who was influencing whom has been obscured by the subsequent idea that Kott’s writing shaped Brook’s landmark production of *King Lear*; not to mention the subsequent mythology built around his émigré status as a Cold War warrior from the outset. The initial indifference and hostility of British critics and audiences to the Cold War appositeness of productions like *Titus Andronicus* evident in 1955 would eventually be assailed, undermined, and replaced by such an influential academic text, not to mention the accumulated weight of subsequent RSC productions inspired by Kott’s writing throughout the 1960s.

A wide number of objections have been raised against the notion of the Grand Mechanism, as well as Kott’s claim that Shakespeare is contemporary.<sup>168</sup> Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield’s essay ‘History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*’ provided important insight into the writer’s instrumental role in maintaining the fledgling RSC’s ‘mystifying confirmation of the *status quo*’ in the 1960s through the very imprecision of its supposedly radical gestures.<sup>169</sup> Amounting to what they then termed the ‘Brook-Hall convergence’, Kott’s ‘implacable roller of history’ that ‘crushes everybody and everything’ enabled the institutional entrenchment of a ‘pessimistic

<sup>168</sup> See for example, Leanore Lieblein, ‘Jan Kott, Peter Brook and *King Lear*’, in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 1:2 (1987), 39-50; Carl Tighe ‘Jan Kott: the revisionist’, *Journal of European Studies*, 26.3 (1996), 267-97.

<sup>169</sup> Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, ‘History and Ideology: The Instance of *Henry V*’, in *Alternative Shakespeares*, pp. 210-231 (p. 211).

revision of the Marxist emphasis on history'.<sup>170</sup> Sinfield argued that in Cold War Britain such a theory espoused a pervasive and despairing worldview that diverted left-wing political energy away from action and towards quietism and surrender.

## Conclusion

As Alan Sinfield has asserted, Shakespeare 'is the cultural token which gives significance to the interpretations which are derived from him'.<sup>171</sup> Brook's radical interpretation was facilitated by both the unfamiliarity and unevenness of the *Titus Andronicus* play-text. These qualities justified an extreme level of directorial interpretation and a claim of not only discovering the 'real' Shakespeare but one providing Europe with a timely anti-Communist message. Rather than being an instance of audacious cultural overreach, the 'evidence' of an Elizabethan text anticipating and commenting upon the iniquities of Soviet rule seemed only to confirm the genius and timelessness of Shakespeare's work. Brook's interpretation was granted political weight because it claimed not to be coming from him but from such a universal 'Shakespeare', and also that it was the preeminent British Shakespeare company who were validating and disseminating such insights for the world to see.

Shakespeare was advantageous for Britain's anti-Communist diplomacy because, rather than planting the seed of Western cultural influence from without, it appeared to come from within a shared and inclusive European cultural heritage. In this sense, Shakespeare played an actual historical role in allowing the British visitors to gesture towards the percolation of ideas and texts that pre-dated Sovietisation. Georg Lukács read *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* following its translation into German and in a letter to Kott pointed out that not only had he 'failed to recognise in Shakespeare the

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<sup>170</sup> Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 185; Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 47.

<sup>171</sup> Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, p. 174.

characteristic Renaissance belief in a better world' but that his theory of the Grand Mechanism was 'a generalisation based on the limited historical evidence of Stalinism' itself.<sup>172</sup> Kott conceded that 'undoubtedly Lukács was right to a large degree' but qualified the admission with the comment that 'that was precisely what made Shakespeare our contemporary'.<sup>173</sup> This slippery response seems emblematic of the dubious and contradictory claims being made on both Shakespeare and history within Kott's work and legacy.

As the Cold War advanced throughout the 1950s the 'positive' propaganda that had advertised the 'British way of life' overseas between 1939 and 1955 was replaced by more politically directed anti-Communist practices. The value of Shakespearean diplomatic touring increased as military stalemate saw culture deployed as a compensatory device. Domestically, the long post-war consensus enjoyed by a generation of theatre practitioners began to recede under a new wave of 'angry young men', though Cold War texts like *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* helped provide establishment Shakespeare with a much-needed radical posture for the coming decade.<sup>174</sup> The 1960s would see the continuation of Shakespeare tours in service to national cultural diplomacy as Britain sought to influence newly independent African nation-states following widespread decolonisation and transition towards the postcolonial era.

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<sup>172</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 201.

<sup>173</sup> Kott, *Still Alive*, p. 201.

<sup>174</sup> Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All That: the Making of Modern British Drama* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), pp. 116-18.

## Chapter 4.

### Shakespeare and Decolonisation: *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* in Nigeria

On 11 July 1962, the British Council's DAC held its second quarterly meeting of that year. Following a discussion on a forthcoming Bristol Old Vic tour of Pakistan, India, and Ceylon, the committee considered the practical details for a 'tour of West Africa by Nottingham Playhouse Company [...] planned for 1962/63'.<sup>1</sup> By that stage the Nottingham Playhouse Trust had already approved the tour in principle, envisaging a run of ten weeks:

giving approximately 23 performances at six towns in Nigeria, 11 performances at four towns in Ghana and 9 performances at two towns in Sierra Leone [...] the Company will take three plays, one of which will certainly be *Macbeth* since it is a set book, but the other two are still under discussion [...] the Company would be led by John Neville, who is very anxious to undertake this tour, and he will also be responsible for one or two of the productions [...] The sum of £15,000 has been provisionally set aside for this tour and rough budgets are now being prepared.<sup>2</sup>

The committee's advisory role was chiefly to make suggestions for the other two plays to be performed, though the minutes reveal many of its participants had some difficulty envisioning Shakespeare playing in West Africa at all. One member felt that 'audiences in West Africa' were likely to be 'less sophisticated than those in the Indian Subcontinent' and hence suggested sending 'just one Shakespeare play and two other plays of high quality suited to the audience'.<sup>3</sup> With such attitudes fairly prevalent it is

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<sup>1</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 120/3 Drama Advisory Committee: minutes and papers of meetings, 1961-1965, 11 July 1962. The committee at that time included Michael Benthall, Hugh Beaumont, Philip Hope-Wallace, Ivor Brown, Kenneth Tynan, and Peter Ustinov amongst others.

<sup>2</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 11 July 1962.

<sup>3</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 11 July 1962.

worth noting how ambitious and ground breaking the venture was considered by many at the time.

A central figure in managing the practical aspects of the tour was Valery West. Reviewing her twenty-seven years working with the British Council's Dance and Drama Department, West described her role as:

planning and organising groups of theatre companies, touring abroad. Promoting Britain, really. [...] the largest part of the British Council's work is English language teaching and the cultural part of it, cultural exchange, was in support of that, more or less. And we were supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.<sup>4</sup>

In the light of the DAC's decision-making and West's comments, this chapter will consider why so much work was put into 'cultural exchange' in West Africa in 1963 given the perceived challenges involved. Did the touring productions of *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Arms and the Man* support the British Council's principal work in English language teaching, or does West's 'more or less' signify other interests as well?<sup>5</sup>

As West points out, traditionally 'companies would come to us saying, 'we've been invited to Japan [...] and we need some money' and the Department was simply 'doling [it] out'. By the early 1960s when she joined however, the British Council 'was actually commissioning tours' and was more involved 'if you wanted to tour to Africa' and you wanted 'a company [...] able to put up with the sort of conditions that they would get there'.<sup>6</sup> This in turn raises the more general question of who commissioned the tour in the first instance, and why? As it entertained both school audiences and the wider West African public, we should also consider whether such broad cultural outreach had any Cold War or neo-colonial implications.

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<sup>4</sup> Sophie Bush, 'Valerie West Interview Transcript' (London: British Library Theatre Archive Project, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> For a critical account of the British Council's role in English Language Teaching (ELT), see Phillipson. For a more general history of ELT see A. P. R. Howatt and H. G. Widdowson, *A History of Second Language Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Bush, p. 12.

News of such a prestigious touring opportunity was greeted with enthusiasm in Nottingham's local press; proud that the British Council had 'invited the Nottingham Playhouse to make the first-ever visit of a British theatre company to West Africa':<sup>7</sup>

Nottingham Playhouse has become, in theatrical circles, as famous as the Old Vic. Our company – not theirs – has been chosen to be the first to visit West Africa under the auspices of the British Council [...] it is a wonderful tribute to the worth of our own repertory company that we should be invited.<sup>8</sup>

As there was traditionally a preference for deploying more renowned companies such as the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and the Old Vic Company to work 'under the auspices' of the British Council, why was a small repertory company established only sixteen years previously commissioned for such an ambitious venture? Presumably, the opportunity meant it was more willing to 'put up with the sort of conditions' that West Africa was expected to present. What were those imagined conditions and how did they contrast with the reality found on the ground? This chapter will establish how the tour was prepared in Britain, received in Nigeria, and commemorated upon its return.

In its final formation, the Nottingham Playhouse tour of West Africa ran from 6 January to 15 March 1963, performing Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth*, as well as George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. Officially it involved forty-eight performances in thirteen towns and cities across the three nation-states of Nigeria (which gained independence from Britain in 1960), Ghana (which became independent in 1957), and Sierra Leone (which achieved its independence in 1961). Anecdotally it gave something closer to 70 performances in venues ranging from school halls, open-air cinemas, sports stadiums, missionary outposts, and even President Nkrumah's Palace.<sup>9</sup> The tour was

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<sup>7</sup> Anon, 'Three Plays for West Africa', *Stage and Television Today*, 27 September 1962.

<sup>8</sup> Anon, 'Honoured Playhouse will Keep the Home Shows Going', *Nottingham Evening News*, 28 September 1962.

<sup>9</sup> The full 1963 West African Tour itinerary was, Nigeria: Lagos (6-15 January), Kaduna and Zaria (16-20 January), Kano (21-24 January), Nsukka, Enugu, and Port Harcourt (25 January - 4 February), Ibadan (5-12

supported by Alfred Farell as manager, Simon Carter as stage manager, Anthony Church as sound and lighting technician, and Doris Nicholas in wardrobe. The Playhouse's acting company was led by John Neville and consisted of fifteen actors including Terence Knapp, James Cairncross, and Paul Daneman.<sup>10</sup>

Judi Dench also joined the Nottingham Playhouse Company tour at the end of her first contract with the RSC. In her most recent autobiography *And Furthermore* (2012), Dench claims that 'such a tour had never been done before' and that 'we went out there long before Peter Brook, who claimed to be the first some years later'.<sup>11</sup> Though challenging Brook's assertion, both claims of inaugurating the arrival of 'western' theatre to the continent illustrates ill-informed attitudes towards African theatre more generally. At the time of the tour the future Nobel prize-winning dramatist Wole Soyinka was researching, writing, and devising new forms of West African drama both in the UK and in his native Nigeria. This was part of a much wider and lively independence-era cultural movement of the time. His play *A Dance in the Forests* (1960) celebrated Nigerian sovereignty and had already received prizes and critical accolades in London well prior to 1963. In Nigeria he assisted in bringing traditional Yoruba theatrical practices into University departments, leading to the emergence of a new Nigerian theatre for the independence era. Such research adapted European dramatists as diverse as Pinter, Anouilh, Moliere, Beckett, and Shakespeare into a successful local idiom that toured extensively.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, the actors and administrators involved in the Nottingham tour

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February). Ghana: Cape Coast (13-16 February), Takoradi (17-19 February), Accra (24 February - 6 March). Sierra Leone: Freetown (6-15 March). TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 11 July 1962.

<sup>10</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 11 July 1962. The full acting company was John Neville, Polly Adams, Peter Blythe, James Cairncross, Simon Carter, Paul Daneman, Judi Dench, Marielaine Douglas, Patrick Duffy, Jill Gascoine, Richard Hampton, Terence Knapp, Terence Palmer, John Toye, and Peter Wilkins.

<sup>11</sup> During a public debate at the National Theatre in the early 1990s, Brook claimed to have introduced British (or even European) theatre to 'Africa'. Dench publicly challenged this claim with the example of the Nottingham Players' tour. Dench, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Dele Layiwola, ed., *African Theatre in Performance: A Festschrift for Martin Banham* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Press, 2000), p. xiii. Having already completed his Masters degree at the University of Leeds, written and performed at the Royal Court Theatre, and had two successful UK productions brought back

asserted Dench's view that 'in West Africa they had never seen a theatre company before, and had no idea what to expect'.<sup>13</sup> It seems incredible now, though symptomatic of broader attitudes at the time, that British journalists, theatre practitioners, government administrators, and cast members who toured on the ground could have remained so ignorant of the cultural contexts they went to such lengths to involve themselves in. Such gaps invite a closer comparison between accounts of emerging Nigerian theatre practices and the work of the visiting British tourists. The comparison also requires a more critical perspective on both the content and rhetorical features of the existing British accounts in the light of post-colonial considerations. As the tour was deployed at a time when Nigeria was experiencing a renaissance in its theatre arts, wouldn't it be accurate to assess it less as a pioneering cultural expedition that took Shakespeare to new regions, and more as a deliberate neo-colonial intervention into Nigeria's post-independence culture at the very moment of its inception?

### **Decision-Making behind the Tour**

Why did Britain's leading body for orchestrating cultural diplomacy want to take professional productions of *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Arms and the Man* to West Africa in 1963? The official view evident in archival records indicates that it was commissioned to counter recent international competition and came as a direct response to Foreign and Commonwealth Office appeals. The DAC's chairman later pointed out that the Playhouse tour 'was the result of a very urgent request from Lord Head for a company to counterbalance the success of companies mounted by the Russians and the Americans'.<sup>14</sup>

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to Nigeria, Wole Soyinka returned to The University of Ibadan to assist Geoffrey Axworthy at the Arts Theatre and set up his theatre company The 1960 Masks. All of this took place prior to the Nottingham Players' tour.

<sup>13</sup> Dench, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Lord Head was an ex-Conservative Member of Parliament, Secretary of State for War (1951-1956) and Minister of Defence in Churchill and Eden's cabinet (1956-1957). At the time of the DAC meeting, he was



There is evidence to support the notion that the tour was a countermeasure against Cold War rivals encroaching into Britain's traditional sphere of influence following decolonisation. In terms of the Soviet Union the University of Ibadan's Arts Theatre was hosting Russian theatrical companies in 1961.<sup>15</sup> As far as European rivalry across Africa was concerned, following Algerian independence on 1 July 1962 one British journalist asserted that the Nottingham players would enjoy the symbolic prestige of being 'the first visit to West Africa by any professional theatre company' because 'a projected French tour this year had to be cancelled' following the region's outrage over 'French nuclear tests in the Sahara'.<sup>16</sup>

There was also competition between the British Council and the United States' Information Services (USIS) at the time, as commented upon in the Northern Nigeria Regional Representative's accounts:

During the year [...] [the Americans] have increased their activities, and have formed American-Nigerian Cultural Clubs, rather in the style of what the Council used to do in the old days [...] one of their major manifestations was staging Cozy Cole and his Jazz Band.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the period of the 1950s and 1960s, many African American musicians were conscripted into the service of the United States' Cultural Cold War, especially as America's history of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregationist policies tarnished its global reputation and undermined its foreign policy aims across Africa.<sup>18</sup> Cozy Cole's band for example, was successfully touring Ghana at the same time as the Nottingham Playhouse

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the High Commissioner for Nigeria (1960-1963) and would go on to become High Commissioner for Malaysia (1963-66).

<sup>15</sup> University of Leeds Special Collections Archive (ULSCA): MS 1748/1 'African theatre manuscripts and associated material, assembled by Martin Banham', includes theatre programmes from visiting Russian companies performing in Ibadan as part of a larger Western Nigeria tour in 1961.

<sup>16</sup> Anon, 'Playhouse Choose Cast for their West African Tour', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 27 November 1962. John Springhall, *Decolonisation Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 146-56.

<sup>17</sup> The National Archives (TNA): BW 128/9, Representative's Annual Reports, 1959-1963, 'British Council Northern Nigeria Annual Report 1962/63', p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> See Carol Anderson, 'The Histories of African Americans' Anti-colonialism During the Cold War', in *The Cold War in the Third World*, pp. 178-91 (p. 179).

tour in early 1963, with Cole being christened ‘Kwesi’ Cole by the Ghanaian press and generating much local interest and enthusiasm for the cultural fusion of his ‘West African High-Life’ inspired jazz project.<sup>19</sup> Official British reports indicate that there was a persistent impression that the ex-colonial power needed to regain lost ground in the face of the USIS’s cultural advances. As the Annual Report for that year put it, manifestations such as the Playhouse tour were of great value:

While on the one hand the [Nigerian] Ministries ask us for a great variety of obligations, on the other hand they are ready, particularly on a special occasion such as the visit by Nottingham Playhouse, to help us in any way they can. Personal contacts help to sustain this happy relationship of mutual respect but it is founded on fifteen years of honest endeavour by the Council in this region. The useful things done in colonial days are still in demand today.<sup>20</sup>

The tangible sense of imperial nostalgia attests to how rapidly British prestige had ebbed away in the immediate wake of decolonisation, and how the tour was viewed as a much-needed and long-overdue resuscitation of fading colonial-era relations.

Despite invoking anti-Communism in his initial appeal for a tour a distinctly imperial attitude seemed to colour the worldview of Lord Head, the British High Commissioner for Nigeria at the time. Hearing that Shakespeare and Shaw were on their way he reportedly exclaimed, ‘Oh God, no, no, they’re not ready for that. Bring a circus!’<sup>21</sup> Whatever the veracity of this Colonel Blimp caricature, it is certainly worth looking beyond the broad geopolitical justifications found in reports meant for official consumption, and paying closer attention to journalistic and anecdotal sources closer to the ground. After all, the Cold War provided convenient ideological cover for predatory

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<sup>19</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors play the Cold War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 78. The fusion of West African High Life with American Jazz was a feature of the independence era. The ensuing black musical diaspora that moved between West Africa, the US, France, and the UK also led to the creation of Fela Kuti’s Afro-Beat style. See Carlos Moore, *Fela, Fela: This Bitch of a Life* (London: Omnibus Press, 2010), pp. 73-80.

<sup>20</sup> TNA: BW 128/9 Representative’s annual reports, 1959-1963, ‘British Council Northern Nigeria Annual Report 1962/63’, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> John Miller, *Judi Dench: With a Crack in her Voice* (London: Phoenix, 2013), p. 65.

neo-colonial manoeuvres aimed at easing European nations' transition from formal power to informal influence following the independence of many African nations.<sup>22</sup>

The Nigerian press often recycled the publicity photos and sound-bites provided to them by the British Information Services, such as stating that the reason for the tour was that its leader John Neville was an 'idealist who fulfils his ideals' and has 'always believed that the living theatre should be spread'.<sup>23</sup> Alfred Farrell, the company's road manager with extensive previous experience touring overseas (including a recent British Council sponsored circuit across South America with Vivienne Leigh and Robert Helpmann), proved more revealing in his interview with the *Nigeria Morning Herald*.<sup>24</sup>

This sort of tour, going where no professional English company has been before, can be so satisfying. It can do so much good work, not only from the educational point of view, but by helping to improve social and cultural relations between countries [...] I keep in mind three clear aims – to get to West Africa, to give absolutely the best performance we are capable of, and to make as many friends as we can [...] anxieties? Certainly not. We are not such fools as to expect elaborately equipped theatres everywhere we go in what are really new countries, still developing'<sup>25</sup>

Alongside the vague diplomatic assurances of 'helping to improve social and cultural relations between countries', giving 'the best performance we are capable of', and making 'as many friends as we can', Farrell's comments delineate some of the more concrete incentives behind the undertaking. Though downplaying their significance, references to 'the educational point of view' and that the tour would target 'new countries, still developing', suggests that behind the warm expressions of cultural exchange was a definite awareness of economic opportunities in the field of educational development.

Commercial interests determined British Shakespeare's West African excursions

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<sup>22</sup> For the relationship between Third World decolonisation and US globalisation during the Cold War see, Kunibert Raffer and H. W. Singer, *The Economic North-South Divide: Six Decades of Unequal Development* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2001), pp. 64-78; Westad, pp. 152-57.

<sup>23</sup> Anon, 'The Formidable Force From Nottingham', *Nigeria Outlook*, 23 January 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Anon, 'The Formidable Force From Nottingham'.

<sup>25</sup> C. A. Dove, 'Three Aims of Farrell', *Nigeria Morning Post*, 12 January 1963.

in 1963. This is evident from the fact that the opinions and advice of the expatriate British business community based there were deliberately sought after, giving them a guiding hand in the tour's formation from the outset.<sup>26</sup> Valerie West sketched out how this network operated, stating that:

they wanted something in West Africa [...] And the Foreign Office people, the High Commission, consulted all the business people who were exporting to West Africa, and said, 'what sort of show do you think would go down well? Would you like variety shows?' And they said, 'no, we want Shakespeare'. And so Shakespeare's what they got.<sup>27</sup>

This pragmatic, though obscure and informal, decision-making process typifies the intertwining of state-private interests characteristic of the cultural-diplomatic uses to which Shakespeare has been put throughout this study. It serves as a reminder that in its earliest formation, the British Council was built in the final days of the late-1930s liberal economic era. It was intended to garner private funds for pro-British commercial support and sponsorship, before its functions were absorbed into the state during the 1940s. Despite this, by the early 1960s it still retained its agenda of supporting private commercial interests considered of national importance and, as the Drogheda Report helped clarify, British cultural exchange was always in service to specific commercial and diplomatic aims.<sup>28</sup>

Although it might seem surprising that there would be corporate interest in deploying Shakespeare throughout West Africa, the educational book publishing industry provides a clear example of the kinds of links that existed between West's 'people who were exporting' to Nigeria, and the Nottingham Players' tour. With *Macbeth* being a set text on the secondary school English Literature curriculum across West Africa at the time, UK publishers stood to make substantial profits by maintaining their hold on the

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<sup>26</sup> Bush, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Bush, p. 12

<sup>28</sup> Phillipson, p. 138.

burgeoning educational book market that spread across Commonwealth markets.<sup>29</sup> In the wake of decolonisation, a great deal of state-funded investment went directly into rapid modernisation with education and skills-training targeted as a means of turbo-charging Nigeria's national development. In a common post-independence practice of rushing to invest in the hope of catching up with the more mature economies of America and Western Europe, a commission on Nigerian education headed by the British educationalist Sir Eric Ashby recommended the country invest £75,000,000 over ten years to combat an illiteracy rate of 85 per cent.<sup>30</sup> Given this compulsion to persuade fledgling nation-states to borrow and spend exorbitant amounts in order to mitigate the debilitating legacy of colonial rule, it seems apt to consider to what extent the Playhouse tour also fitted into such patterns of neo-colonial control and intervention.

### **Philanthropy and Education in Nigeria**

Rather than displacing Cold War and postcolonial concerns, early American investment in the foundation of Nigerian educational institutions provides a significant context in which even Shakespeare tours can be understood as part of wide-ranging Anglo-American neo-colonial policies. The Nottingham Players' visit was far from being the one-off expeditionary touring event it was portrayed as at the time. In Nigeria it followed the example of the University of Ibadan's Arts Theatre tours instigated by resident British academics such as Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham.<sup>31</sup> Though inspired by

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<sup>29</sup> Caroline Davis, 'Creating a Book Empire: Longmans in Africa', in *The Book in Africa: Critical Debates*, ed. by Caroline Davis and David Johnson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 128-52.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Bourne, *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century* (London: Zed Books, 2015), p. 105.

<sup>31</sup> For the early history of the University of Ibadan's Drama Department, the Arts Theatre, and their influence on Nigerian culture and society more generally, see Peter Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Obi Nkakanma, *Christopher Okigbo 1930-1967: Thirsting for Sunlight* (Woodbridge: James Currey Press, 2010); Robert Wren, *Those Magical Years: The Making of Nigerian Literature at Ibadan, 1948-1966* (Washington, WA: Three Continents Press, 1990).

the spirit of independence, national-populist in its aims, and committed to community outreach, such tours originated from the more elitist bastion of Nigeria's first University campus at Ibadan. As such they were made possible by the large economic investments undertaken by American philanthropic organisations. Although the Arts Theatre at Ibadan University had been in place since 1954, the Drama Department that devised and managed the post-independent explosion in national and regional theatre touring had only recently been established in 1960 as the result of a large grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>32</sup>

America's post-war investment policy towards newly independent and developing nations evidences a correlation between Cold War policy and neo-colonial practices. As Edward H. Berman establishes in his study of the role that the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller foundations played in American Foreign policy towards decolonising African nations after 1945:

The foundations devised strategies to bind the newly independent African nations to the United States [...] The most important way [...] was by devising programmes linking the educational systems of the new African nations to the values, *modi operandi*, and institutions of the United States.<sup>33</sup>

Typical of America's post-war economic diplomacy, financial investment was characterised as non-political and technocratic in nature, aimed solely at fostering development through modernisation.<sup>34</sup> Given its huge population base, mineral resources, and geopolitical mass and importance, the Ford Foundation saw fit to invest \$25,000,000 in Nigeria between 1958 and 1969. \$8,000,000 underwrote university

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<sup>32</sup> Walter Schwarz, *Nigeria* (London: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968); Springhall, pp. 125-31. Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham founded the University of Ibadan's School of Drama in 1962. Martin Banham, Errol Hill, and George Woodyard, eds., *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Edward H. Berman, 'The Foundations' Role in American Foreign Policy: The Case of Africa, post 1945', in *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad*, ed. by Robert F. Arnove (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 203-32 (p. 204).

<sup>34</sup> Berman, p. 204.

development with \$5,000,000 of that going into the University of Ibadan alone. Including university-centred investment programmes in economic development, planning, and public administration, \$15,000,000 was spent on higher education in Nigeria by this one foundation alone.<sup>35</sup>

Such largesse translated into the kind of soft power that could secure considerable American influence in Nigeria. In terms of the entrenchment of Western education policies onto African territories, such shared Anglo-American practices dated back to the British Colonial Office's enthusiasm for the Phelps-Stokes Commission's recommendations of 1922 and 1925. That report proposed adopting a version of the deeply flawed manual and vocational education system implemented in the southern United States during the reconstruction era, and then applying it to Britain's African colonies.<sup>36</sup> In terms of Cold War antagonisms, Britain and America's desire to insinuate themselves in the fortunes of post-independence West African nations was justified as a necessary measure to ensure that Soviet influence was kept to a minimum. In liberal-economic terms, it also meant ensuring continued access to raw materials, the provision of lucrative investment opportunities, and unfettered access to growing African markets. As one foundation asserted at the time, dollar diplomacy would help the US 'exert an extraordinary leverage' following the formal dissolution of European Empires across the African continent.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In Berman, pp. 209-10; Schwarz, *Nigeria*, pp. 114-17.

<sup>36</sup> On Phelps-Stokes, see Caroline Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 22-4, p. 70; David Johnson, 'From the Colonial to the Post-Colonial: Shakespeare and Education in Africa', in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. by Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998) pp. 218-34. On the colonial and neo-colonial role that Shakespeare had played in teaching and criticism in South Africa, see David Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> In Bergman, pp. 209-10. Programmes included the creation of lead universities, emphasis on social science and manpower planning programmes, as well as the training of public administrators, teachers, and curriculum developers. For details on foundation funding into the University of Ibadan at the time, see E. Jefferson Murphy, *Creative Philanthropy: Carnegie Corporation and Africa, 1953-1973* (New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation Publishing, 1976), pp. 164-67.

Although the implications of these interventions would not be broadly felt and understood until much later with the onset of the Biafran War in 1967, trans-Atlantic investments during the inception period of true nationhood shaped Nigeria's cultural legacy profoundly.<sup>38</sup> The most germane example of this in regards to the Nottingham Players' tour was the University of Ibadan's Arts Theatre. Geoffrey Axworthy's appointment as the head of the Drama Department instigated thriving research into the practices and traditions of indigenous Yoruba travelling theatre. This took place within an institutional environment steeped in Western academic traditions and mostly staffed by European and American scholars. The Yoruba had long been associated with Nigerian nationalism, and post-war performances of Yoruba protest theatre such as Hubert Ogunde's *Africa and God* (1944), *Strike and Hunger* (1945), and *Worse than Crime* (1945) exposed British colonial rulers to critical scrutiny through popular satire.<sup>39</sup> The University's enthusiasm for Yoruba theatre following independence signalled the meeting of academic and popular art forms, and symbolised the optimistic strand of patriotic nationalism that typified the early independence movement. Experiments in adapting Western texts to elements of this local theatrical idiom moved a stage further in 1962, when the Yoruba practitioner Kola Orunmola took up residence at the University of Ibadan. This congregation famously culminated in the stage adaptation of Amos Tutuola's Onitsha market literature novel *The Palm-wine Drinkard* (1952), a popular and critical success that betokened the arrival of a uniquely Nigerian mode of theatrical

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<sup>38</sup> See for example, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Curry, 2011); Wole Soyinka, *Ibadan: The Penkele Years, A Memoir 1946-65* (London: Methuen, 1994); Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (New York, NY: Random House, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Dapo Adelugba, Olu Obafemi, and Sola Adeyemi, 'Nigeria', in *A History of Theatre in Africa*, pp. 138-58 (p. 140). According to J. A. Adedji, Yoruba Travelling Theatre evidences traces of a socio-cultural evolution in three 'developmental' stages; from ritual, to festive forms, and finally arriving at 'theatrical' entertainment. Growing 'out of and along with ritual' its complex form of total theatre involved mask making, painstaking rehearsals, and rigorous staging. Yoruba Travelling Theatre had remained dominant until the advent of the colonial period in the late nineteenth century. Adelugba, Obafemi and Adeyemi, *A History of Theatre in Africa*, p. 140; J. A. Adedji, 'Oral Tradition and the Contemporary Theatre in Nigeria', *Research In African Literatures*, 2.2 (1971), 196-200.



expression for the independence era.<sup>40</sup>

To summarise, the surface simplicity of Lord Head's broad concern with Cold War competitiveness belies a host of more specific neo-colonial concerns. Similarities between the United States' economic diplomacy and British desires to support established UK businesses overseas, suggest that the Nottingham Players' tour helped sustain a wide range of Anglo-American investments in the region. In the realpolitik of the global standoff between the Soviet and American superpowers, Britain simply did not enjoy the degree of Cold War stature and control that Lord Head's comments imply. Though the desire to counter any Communist interference was no doubt real, the overarching concern was to tie decolonising African nations closely to Britain linguistically, culturally, and economically, at the very moment that they separated politically. Before detailing the reception of the Nottingham Player's Shakespeare performances in Nigeria, it is necessary to establish the role that English language teaching played as a conduit for British political and commercial interests at the time.

### **The British Council in West Africa**

By 1963 the British Council was in a unique position to influence the direction of Nigerian education and culture, chiefly because it enjoyed the impression of being non-political. Its earliest activities in West Africa began with the establishment of Representatives in Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone immediately following the Second World War. Despite its long affiliation to the Foreign Office in Europe and elsewhere, a new principle was established that its work in Africa be transferred to a Colonial Office vote. In effect this meant that the Secretary of State for Colonies was answerable to

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<sup>40</sup> Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952).

Parliament for cultural advancement in Britain's African Dependencies.<sup>41</sup> A circular letter from 1949 outlines some of the Cold War concerns framing the Colonial Office's educational and cultural aims in post-war Africa:

In the long term we want to strengthen the links between Britain and the colonial peoples so that the latter, as they obtain greater control over their own affairs, will still value the British connection [...] We feel that the Council can do valuable positive work in countering Communist propaganda by showing that Britain and the Western tradition for which Britain stands has something better to offer than the Communist way of life.<sup>42</sup>

By the late 1950s and early 1960s many of the Colonial Office's imperial presumptions would seem absurdly self-assured given the rapid spread of decolonisation throughout the continent. In terms of soft power however, the British Council was well prepared, and perfectly placed, to continue guiding post-independent African nations in the direction of Britain's interests.

Decolonisation actually brought the British Council an increase in opportunity and activities across a range of fields, especially with regards to education. As can be seen in structural departmental changes between 1945 and 1963, British Council activities grew in proportion to the retreat of Colonial Office administrations in Asia and Africa.<sup>43</sup> Such administrative changes were necessary because the unbalanced education system Britain bequeathed Nigeria was a legacy of indirect imperial rule.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence Nigeria was reticent to accept 'aid' from Harold Macmillan's Department of Technical

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<sup>41</sup> Phillipson, p. 154.

<sup>42</sup> In Donaldson, p. 155.

<sup>43</sup> Harold Macmillan's new Department for Technical Co-operation would have 1000 of its 1,050 staff members made up of 'job-perpetuating ex-Colonial personnel', given the remit of 'furnishing countries outside of the United Kingdom with technical assistance in the field of economic development, administration and social services'. Donaldson, pp. 218-22.

<sup>44</sup> For Frederick Lugard's form of indirect rule in the region see, Schwarz, *Nigeria*, pp. 80-90. At the end of the 1940s Ghana had an estimated 32 journalists, 38 medical doctors, and 114 lawyers for a population of 4.5 million. Nigeria had 150 lawyers and 160 doctors for around 40 million people. By 1955 only 3000 British West African colonial subjects were studying at UK universities. T. E. Vadney, *The World Since 1945* 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 134-35.

Cooperation.<sup>45</sup> The seemingly autonomous position of the British Council made it able to allay such fears, as it was presented as working globally and with a wide range of foreign, developing, and Commonwealth countries. This helped ensure that any lingering sense of post-imperial patronage was mitigated.<sup>46</sup>

Anglo-American academies formed a close working relationship around the global provision of English Language Teaching (ELT). From 1954:

Cabinet approval for [the Drogheda Report findings] [...] ensured financial support for the massive expansion of the ELT field. The creation of university departments for teaching and research, the provision of ELT training in Britain and more attractive conditions of employment abroad for British teachers of English (as well as other subjects), training in Britain for key ELT people from abroad, co-ordination with British publishers, support for British books overseas – all these were to be promoted in order to provide professional and logistic backing for the effort to make English a world language, an undisputed ‘universal second language’.<sup>47</sup>

A senior British Council representative reported in 1960 that ‘the Americans were planning a ‘great offensive’ to make English a world language’ with Britain committed to working alongside them to implement an ‘English language campaign on an unprecedented global scale’.<sup>48</sup>

A landmark event in the history of the British Council in Africa was the ‘Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language’ that took place at Makerere University, Uganda in January 1961.<sup>49</sup> This Anglo-American event articulated

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<sup>45</sup> See Lee, pp. 125-26.

<sup>46</sup> Indication of the increasing importance placed on cultural and educational activity is reflected in the British Council’s grant-in-aid from the Government Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It grew substantially from just below £5,000,000 in 1959-60 to £6,664,392 in 1962-63, and £9,702,881 in 1964-65. The growth in funding mirrored increased activity in ELT, inward and outward visits (including tours, lectures etc.), and the establishment of libraries. Donaldson, p. 227.

<sup>47</sup> Phillipson, p. 151.

<sup>48</sup> Phillipson, p. 133. See also, A. H. King ‘The Nature and Demand for English in the World Today, as it affects British Universities’, in *English Teaching Abroad and the British Universities*, ed. by H. G. Wayment (London: Methuen, 1961), pp. 22-25. 1960 saw the establishment of training for 850 ELT professionals posted throughout the Commonwealth (principally by the Universities of London and Leeds, both of which had close ties to the University of Ibadan) and over 50 lecturers from British universities being posted to Commonwealth countries as well. Donaldson, p. 217.

<sup>49</sup> Donaldson, p. 216. On the Makerere Conference see also, A. P. R. Howatt and H. G. Widdowson, pp. 310-14.

demands for teacher training, the publishing and dissemination of professional textbooks, and the creation of new educational institutions and curriculums on a vast and coordinated international scale. On a commercial level, the conference opened up enormous business opportunities for UK publishers such as Oxford University Press and Longmans, not to mention a valuable future revenue stream for the British Council itself.<sup>50</sup> Though often supplanted by indigenous official languages, English still provided the *lingua franca* in many multilingual ex-colonial nation states. The language retained its historical position as a common argot for the professional classes, whilst America's economic diplomacy further strengthened its association with international commerce and industry. In West Africa too, knowledge and use of the English language became synonymous with an international standard of education and signified personal and national advancement in an increasingly globalised world.

### **Book Publishing and Mbari Centres**

The Nottingham Players' tour reached out to two quite distinct audience types, school groups and the general public. In order to understand how both programmes advocated for broader British interests we can look to book publishing, and the establishment of Mbari cultural centres respectively. Despite the challenges, independence presented great opportunities for British publishers, as they were able to maintain their monopoly on supplying school textbooks to West Africa's most populous regions at a time of rapid expansion. Caroline Davis' study *Creating Postcolonial Literature: African Writers and British Publishers* (2013) quotes A. B. Fafunwa's truism that 'examinations control the curriculum and whoever controls the country's examination system controls its education'.<sup>51</sup> British publishers enjoyed the advantage of having their set textbooks (such as the school

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<sup>50</sup> For an overview of Oxford University Press' development of English Language Courses' publications across Africa, see Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*, pp. 17-31. For the British Council's part in the Makerere Conference and Commonwealth English Language Teaching, see Donaldson, pp. 214-16.

<sup>51</sup> In Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*, p. 39.

edition of *Macbeth*) prescribed for school and university exams through the continued ‘retention of a British-style education system’ and the ‘continuation of British-staffed education boards’.<sup>52</sup> Even after 1952, when the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate was replaced by the West African Exams School Certificate Examination expatriate-influenced Ministries of Education ensured ‘rapidly rising sales’ and ‘high profit margins’ for the British publishers ‘serving these markets’.<sup>53</sup> Overall, Davis clearly demonstrates how British publishers were able to continue to ‘operate under colonial modes of publishing’ well into the independence era.<sup>54</sup>

Within the context of decolonisation, the continuing existence of such foreign monopolies required the careful management of public perceptions. This was achieved in part by British publishers supporting the upcoming wave of Nigerian writers. Oxford University Press acquired a comprehensive catalogue of the latest works by emerging Nigerian authors who would go on to constitute a large part of Africa’s Anglophone literary canon. Its simultaneous publication of vast numbers of school textbooks provided ‘unprecedented profits for the London business’.<sup>55</sup> The outlay involved in supporting unknown local writers made economic sense because, even if such ventures ran at a loss, British publishers accrued a great deal of cultural capital from visibly backing Nigerian literature.<sup>56</sup>

Alongside publishing, a number of cultural centres also quickly sprang up throughout Nigeria in support of a renaissance in performing arts. In the mid 1950s, the poet Christopher Okigbo suggested the idea of a national cultural club with an

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<sup>52</sup> Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*, p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*, p. 39. As post-independence Nigeria retained its British-style education system, British-staffed examination boards shaped primary and secondary school curriculums in ways advantageous to UK publishers. Davis, p. 39.

<sup>54</sup> What worked for West Africa had broader implications for English language educational publishing across the entire British Commonwealth, guaranteeing continued British influence in the global regions where its Empire was formally disengaging. Caroline Davis, ‘Publishing Wole Soyinka: Oxford University Press and the creation of ‘Africa’s own William Shakespeare’’, in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48.4 (2011), 344-58 (p. 344).

<sup>55</sup> Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature*, p. 47.

accompanying literary journal. This prompted Chinua Achebe to suggest the Igbo concept of *Mbari* as a suitable title, as 'Mbari was a celebration, through art, of the world and of the life lived through it'.<sup>57</sup> Between 1957 and 1965, the original Mbari centre in Ibadan became 'a robust ferment of intellectual activities' where the first generation of literary dramatists including Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark began staging their work.<sup>58</sup> Situated in the courtyard of a Lebanese restaurant, Ibadan's Mbari Club became synonymous with 'the optimism and creative exuberance of Africa's post-independence era', attracting a variety of artists and writers from across the continent and beyond.<sup>59</sup>

By 1963, upcoming theatre companies were able to benefit from a network of Mbari centres. This growing chain of venues encouraged simultaneous theatrical developments and John Ekwere's Ogui Players, later known as the Eastern Nigerian Theatre Group, found a home for their own successful amateur theatre formations thanks to the British Council's growing involvement.<sup>60</sup> The organisation established two new Mbari clubs, one at its Port Harcourt centre and one in its new building extension in Enugu. The Regional Representative at the time, stated that:

The Ogui Players and their leader John Ekwere are in the forefront of Mbari and the British Council in Enugu is still their home. With the new extension, open air theatre is now possible and among the performances put on by this group during the year, two have been outstanding, *The Song of The Goat* and *Brother Jero*, both completely Nigerian in origin and feeling.<sup>61</sup>

Thanks to such investments, western performers found a new Eastern venue for their touring companies. The site also provided hospitality for six other groups of players during 1963, including the Ibadan University Players performance of *A Comedy of Errors*. Following the visit of the British tour, the local Representative enthused that:

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<sup>57</sup> James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 9. See also, James Currey, 'Literary Publishing after Nigerian Independence: Mbari as Celebration', *Research in African Literatures*, 44.2 (2013), 8-16.

<sup>58</sup> Adelugba, Obafemi, and Adeyemi, *A History of Theatre in Africa*, pp. 152-53.

<sup>59</sup> Anon, 'Ulli Beier: Obituary', *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Adelugba, Obafemi, and Adeyemi, *A History of Theatre in Africa*, p. 152.

<sup>61</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'Representative's Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963', p. 4.

There is no doubt that one of the important by-products of the visit of the Nottingham Playhouse was the ‘shot in the arm’ which it gave to local amateur groups [...] The British Council, which has been referred to in the local press as ‘our old friend in the arts’ has a duty to perform in the encouragement of this serious amateur drama – out of which the professional must come in this part of the world.<sup>62</sup>

Through the genuine enthusiasm and effort of the British Council’s workers in the field, its Mbari centre helped imbricate the British organisation directly into Nigeria’s cultural renaissance. It also provided the ideal institutional context for disseminating UK culture via its support for visiting British companies.

### **Geoffrey Axworthy’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (1962)**

As an example of the powerful Nigerian claims being made on Shakespeare, it is worth considering Geoffrey Axworthy’s Arts Theatre production of *The Taming of the Shrew* that was staged in 1962, a year prior to the arrival of the Nottingham Players. The British academic had been assisting his students’ work in adapting Shakespeare into a successful local idiom at the University of Ibadan for a number of years. The project’s many achievements were mainly thanks to the Drama Department’s embrace of Yoruba performance practices. Axworthy stated that while his department had ‘a tremendous amount to learn’ from Kola Ogunmola ‘about the rapport with the audience and the way the [performance] was structured’ their resident Yoruba practitioner ‘could learn something from us about the technical side of theatre’.<sup>63</sup> Typical Yoruba Travelling Theatre productions employed a variety of arresting performance elements including chants, songs, improvised dialogue, and strong visual spectacles, all within a lively context of robust audience participation. Such interactive and improvisational styles allowed the inclusion of recent and highly topical subject matter. As such Yoruba theatre

<sup>62</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, ‘Representative’s Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963’, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed Yerima, *Modern Nigerian Theatre: Geoffrey Axworthy Years, 1956-1967* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2005), p. 61.

enjoyed a reputation for up-to-the-minute socio-political commentary and ‘a window into popular consciousness’ through the airing of pertinent issues of the day in an open public forum.<sup>64</sup>

The adaptation of the ex-colonial power’s national poet into such a powerful local idiom created something new and uniquely Nigerian. *The Taming of the Shrew* production employed Yoruba-inspired theatrical techniques with great effect. The adaptive use of pidgin English for ‘low’ comic characters had its roots in Onitsha Market Literature and had been successfully employed in the recent adaptation of Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*.<sup>65</sup> Axworthy’s production demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of Nigerian audiences’ central and active role in creating the performance events. Consequently they were able to engage spectators directly, eliciting a range of responses and profiting greatly from Nigerian theatregoers’ expectation and desire to participate fully.

In interview, Axworthy provided some striking accounts of the production in performance. After being kept waiting before the spectacle of an empty stage on which an old high-life phonograph record played, the stage manager would suddenly appear and apologise that the company had been held up and the show, unfortunately, was cancelled. Actors ‘already sprinkled through the audience [...] charged the stage, heckling the manager, and demanded he provide props and costumes for an impromptu performance by the audience itself’.<sup>66</sup> The show began haltingly with scripts in hands but ‘gradually the pretence was dropped’ and the audience realised what was happening. The director described the climax of the spoof:

A whisper passes around the hall, growing into an overwhelming wave of laughter, which stops the play. Such audiences love a practical joke and by this time are truly hooked. They even carry

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<sup>64</sup> Adelugba, Obafemi, and Adeyemi, *A History of Theatre in Africa*, p. 147.

<sup>65</sup> Emmanuel Obiechina, *An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> Yerima, p. 61.



on the pretence. When Katherina, in the closing scene, drops back into her original character of an emancipated Nigerian girl [...] and refuses to do the submission speech, the actors, and then perhaps the whole audience, may beg her to carry on, for the sake of the show. She agrees, it being understood that no self-respecting Nigerian woman would behave like this nowadays.<sup>67</sup>

The use of such Brechtian or ‘total theatre’ devices worked well for Nigerian audiences, and helped facilitate a strengthening of local claims on Shakespeare. By foregrounding the artificiality of its theatrical illusion, the production not only acknowledged the audience’s central role in the performance event, but also encouraged them to reflect and critically evaluate the play’s apparent values. Such performance strategies challenged any notion of Shakespeare’s timelessness or universal relevance. Audience responses could vary greatly across Nigeria’s geographical and cultural expanse. The meta-theatrical gesture made by the actress playing Kate in Kano demonstrated ‘an interesting interaction of the audience with the play’ though ‘it took some courage for the girl to make this point before an all-male Muslim audience in Northern Nigeria’.<sup>68</sup> In Onitsha however, ‘the proscenium wall was literally broken as female members of the audience were cheering for Katherina’.<sup>69</sup> Evidently Nigerian audiences were able to enjoy the material through interaction and making their own claims and judgments upon it. Both audiences and actors held the Shakespearian text up to scrutiny and critical examination through performance within the context of their own cultural time and place. Despite the regional differences to be found across Nigeria, Yoruba techniques helped engender both engagement and healthy irreverence towards the ex-colonial power’s most canonical writer. It is arguable that having a global cultural figure like Shakespeare adapted and performed so successfully by fellow Nigerians garnered a sense of national pride following independence.

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<sup>67</sup> Yerima, pp. 61-62.

<sup>68</sup> Yerima, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Deji Oguntuyinbo, ‘Review of Ahmed Yerima’s *Modern Nigerian Theatre: Geoffrey Axworthy Years, 1956-1967*’, *California Linguistic Notes*, 37.2 (2012), 167-71 (p. 169).

Axworthy's account of such extensive tours confirms that many Nigerians had already seen Shakespeare performed by the Arts Theatre Company. Consequently, it is important to recognise that many audiences would be comparing the Nottingham Playhouse staging against such effective Nigerian theatrical work. The audiences' expectations were primed to anticipate interaction with a production mindful of African performance traditions, and in critical dialogue with a 'Shakespeare' un-shackled from the foreign and elite educational practices it signified during the colonial era. This helps account in a number of ways for the Playhouse tour's difficult reception in Nigeria, especially from its uninhibited public audiences.

### **The Nottingham Playhouse**

By the early 1960s the Nottingham Playhouse had built a strong local following while also achieving national acclaim for productions that were hailed as a triumph of creativity over cramped conditions.<sup>70</sup> Overseas touring opportunities arose from 1961 onwards following the appointment of Frank Dunlop as Artistic Director. From the outset Dunlop brought with him an invitation from the British Council to take a Nottingham production of *Macbeth* to schools in Malta. This Malta tour was led by Eric Thompson (a previous member of the Oxford Playhouse Company with experience touring India, Pakistan, and Ceylon in the late 1950s) and continued as a regional school tour for theatre-less towns outside Nottingham upon its return.<sup>71</sup> When news broke of the invitation, the local press reported that it was 'a direct result of the success of the Malta

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<sup>70</sup> For a history of the Nottingham Playhouse see, John Bailey, *A Theatre for all Seasons: Nottingham Playhouse* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994). See also, George Rowell and Anthony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 131-37.

<sup>71</sup> Anon, 'Macbeth Goes on Tour of County Schools', *Nottingham Guardian*, 24 March 1962.

venture at the end of 1961' and in a sense, both Malta and the Nottinghamshire schools tour served as a trial run for West Africa.<sup>72</sup>

Dunlop understood the advantages of accepting this invitation, explaining to the theatre's board of directors that it would 'attract artists of the right calibre to the company' and 'be of considerable prestige advantage' to such a small regional theatre.<sup>73</sup> The importance of investing time and effort in making industry contacts can be seen in the fact that, although the venture was 'enthusiastically received' and 'artistically a success', the Trust 'would neither make a profit nor suffer any loss' over it.<sup>74</sup> The cultural capital earned by undertaking a high-profile foreign tour helped attract talent such as Judi Dench from the RSC and Paul Daneman from the Old Vic, both of whom continued to work throughout the subsequent Nottingham season upon their return.

Although the initial schools tour of Malta had already starred John Neville as Macbeth in Peter Dew's staging, it was stressed that the West Africa tour should feature a specially adapted production that was directed by Frank Dunlop and designed by Rosemary Vercoe.<sup>75</sup> Prior to setting off, the Nottingham players presented this revised version of *Macbeth* 'with an oriental twist' for a week's preview before local audiences.<sup>76</sup> The actors were clothed in 'light, cotton costumes' that aimed at giving them 'an airier and more barbaric look [...] suitable for the equatorial climes' they would be finding

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<sup>72</sup> Anon, 'Theatre', *Nottingham Observer*, January 1963.

<sup>73</sup> Nottingham County Council Archives (NCCA): GB 0157 DD/NP/1/3/1 Minutes, 1948-1988, 7 July 1961.

<sup>74</sup> NCCA: GB 0157 DD/NP/1/3/1, 6 November 1961. The Board of Governors also understood that such touring was 'certain to boost the prestige of the Playhouse ready for its forthcoming takeover of the new premises in East Circus Street'. Anon, 'Theatre', *Nottingham Observer*, January 1963. At the beginning of 1963 the Nottingham Playhouse was situated in its first home, a converted cinema. Immediately following the West Africa tour it was in the position to move into its much improved, new, and present location thanks in part to 'substantial increases' in Arts Council annual grants including 'donations of £10,000', and '£5,500 from the Gulbenkian Trust'. Adding to this was 'a special government grant for the purpose' of touring West Africa. Baily, p. 70.

<sup>75</sup> Anon, 'Theatre', *Nottingham Observer*, December 1962; Baily, p. 75. *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* were both directed by Frank Dunlop and *Arms and The Man* by Neville, who led the company whilst also playing Macbeth.

<sup>76</sup> E. A. B., 'Macbeth With an Oriental Twist', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19 December 1962.

themselves in.<sup>77</sup> These bright costumes were deliberately designed ‘to appeal to the Africans’ and were the most immediate and obvious signifier of an over-determined production that was misguided in its notions of what would appeal to West African theatregoers.<sup>78</sup> Clearly the gesture towards ‘barbarity’, a loaded word that circulates through most of the British press, is problematic. Throughout the tour the British Information Services issued captioned production photos for the West African press to disseminate, with one explaining that the costume has been given ‘a Japanese look to emphasise the barbaric nature of the play’.<sup>79</sup> In flagging such central design motifs, the production seemed to toy clumsily with ill-conceived racial stereotyping. The invited press seemed painfully aware of just how hard the production was trying, with one local reporter commenting that:

The logic of presenting *Macbeth*, which is about a Scottish tyrant, in Japanese costumes before audiences in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, escapes me for the moment. Maybe the West Africans will appreciate the kimono-type robes and samurai swords without the occasional irreverent association with ‘The Mikado’ that crept into me. [...] there was a certain unease about Frank Dunlop’s production.<sup>80</sup>

Others openly wondered what West African audiences would make of British actors not only dressed ‘in costumes of Japanese idiom’ but also ‘complete with slanting eyebrows’, suggesting that ‘ordinary Scots costume would have been evocative and barbaric enough surely’.<sup>81</sup>

In what appears to be the actualisation of the DAC’s original concerns for playing Shakespeare to West African audiences, even the production’s acting style was modified. The *Nottingham Evening Post* regretted that ‘the deeper subtleties of the tragedy

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<sup>77</sup> Anon, ‘Playhouse preview of tour ‘Macbeth’’, *Guardian Journal*, 12 December 1962.

<sup>78</sup> Louise Rhoades, ‘Acting Their Way from Nottingham to Africa’, *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 1962.

<sup>79</sup> Nottingham County Council Archives (NCCA): GB 0157 DD/NP/2/2/10, Overseas Productions, photograph 4.

<sup>80</sup> E. A. B.

<sup>81</sup> Anon, ‘Japanese ‘Macbeth’ for Africa’, *Nottingham News*, 19 December 1962.

were not plumbed' and that, with its 'exaggeration of gesture and voice' the production constituted 'a melodrama that occasionally dipped even lower', concluding kindly that 'clearly the intention is of simplicity and stark essentials.'<sup>82</sup> In contrast to Neville's nuanced and critically acclaimed portrayal of Macbeth in Malta just a year earlier, 'the lines were shouted – sometimes roared – but there was little feeling beyond rant and melodramatic gesture behind them'.<sup>83</sup> Nottingham reviewers received a special note before performances reminding them to consider it 'a unique experience because this version is not really meant for us'.<sup>84</sup> Without apparent irony the note claimed that the production aimed to place 'emphasis on [the] spoken word rather than atmospheric spectacle'.<sup>85</sup>

One would imagine that the people of Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone would have wanted it the other way around [...] With such an international array, it is difficult for home audiences to appreciate this business of the spoken word, particularly as the weird sisters wear African type witch doctor masks: the throne has a leopard skin on it, and the heads come out of the cauldron like ventriloquist dummies with chubby faces.<sup>86</sup>

Despite Dunlop's denial, the production utilised a busy and mixed visual grammar of Japanese, African, and gothic tropes. Indeed reviewers commented that it 'made a great deal' of its sound and visual effects, with the back projection of scenes 'supplementing a permanent set consisting of nothing more than blocks and steps' which was 'very impressive at times'.<sup>87</sup>

Despite devising such an eccentric production, the British Council advertised the Nottingham Playhouse in the West African press as exemplary, even stating that their 'close connection to such famous Shakespearean actors like Sir Laurence Olivier, and

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<sup>82</sup> E. A. B.

<sup>83</sup> Anon, 'Strange Setting in 'Macbeth': Tour Preview', *Nottingham Evening News*, 19 December 1962.

<sup>84</sup> E. A. B.

<sup>85</sup> Anon, 'Japanese 'Macbeth' for Africa'.

<sup>86</sup> Anon, 'Japanese 'Macbeth' for Africa'.

<sup>87</sup> Anon, 'Strange Setting in 'Macbeth'; Anon, 'Tour Preview'.

Lady Olivier – who was herself a former member of the Nottingham Playhouse company – must be a pointer to the success people expect’.<sup>88</sup> In slightly more modest terms, though still under the bold headline ‘The Formidable Force From Nottingham’, the company promised to ‘bring to West Africa the strongest Nottingham Company on record’. In response one Nigerian journalist added portentously that the visitors professed specialism in verse speaking was something that ‘should commend them to Nigerian audiences’ who could ‘be trusted to know the Shakespearean text’.<sup>89</sup>

### Opening Night: *Macbeth* in Lagos (1963)

The Nigerian leg of the tour began with six performances given in Lagos between January 6 and 15. The first evening performance was timed to celebrate the grand opening of the New Glover Hall Theatre, a refurbishment of the old Glover Memorial Hall that was built in 1899 by European settlers and local elites. The venue had a long association with the British Empire and originally hosted the kinds of concert parties that were the main manifestation of colonial-era theatre.<sup>90</sup> Following independence, its refurbishment was meant to create ‘one of the most modern’ theatres in West Africa despite ‘not actually [being] designed as a drama stage’ at all.<sup>91</sup> Judi Dench recalled that the New Glover Hall provided ‘the only real theatre we played in on the tour; elsewhere we were in the open air’.<sup>92</sup>

The reviews of *Macbeth*’s Lagos debut suggest that the British visitors had seriously underestimated the sophistication of their Nigerian hosts. Given the symbolism

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<sup>88</sup> Anon, ‘Playhouse was finest on NTS’, *Nigerian Morning Post*, 19 January 1963. Olivier suddenly appeared unannounced at a pre-tour run of *Twelfth Night* in Nottingham to be photographed shaking hands with Neville and Dunlop, possibly in order to add some celebrity glitter and professional endorsement that could be circulated back to the West African press.

<sup>89</sup> Anon, ‘The Formidable Force From Nottingham’.

<sup>90</sup> Despite its social pre-eminence colonial theatrical culture stultified in the 1930s, giving way to more local and nationalist modes of performance. Adelugba, Obafemi, and Adeyemi, *A History of Theatre in Africa*, p. 144.

<sup>91</sup> Sam Imayu, ‘Nottingham Players not Impressive’, *Sunday Express*, 20 January 1963.

<sup>92</sup> Dench, p. 36.

of the event, the high expectations generated in the press build-up, and the atmosphere of celebration that surrounded the old theatre's grand reopening, the Lagos audience was vocal in its disappointment with the Nottingham Players. Local playwright Samy Imayu pulled few punches when stating that the show 'fell below expectation [...] in view of the fact that they are a professional group', that it 'tended to [be] something more like a farce or a comedy', and that the visitors 'could not convince the audience that it was a tragic play'.<sup>93</sup> Another reporter felt that the company 'failed to justify their leadership of the British theatre industry' by committing the double sin of both 'over-acting and under-acting at various stages of the play'.<sup>94</sup> Much of the blame was placed on the strange, didactic acting style that the performers adopted throughout. Bewildered commentators complained that the leading actor:

should have given a greater solemnity and action to his soliloquy instead of making one feel he was doing a formal recitation. This I did not expect from a professional actor. Nevertheless this flaw was excellently made up for by John who, while on the stage, pulled a muscle. His resultant limping was so grandly done that spectators must have taken him to be depicting a limping Macbeth.<sup>95</sup>

Given the weakness of the cast and production, not to mention the eccentricity of both the staging and the performance style, a survey of local press reviews suggests that the Nottingham Players astonished their first Nigerian audience to the point where derisive laughter seemed the only apt response. A review written under the pen name Peter Pan provides an insightful account of the social world that the British tourists had stumbled into, explaining in part the disparaging response that their *Macbeth* managed to provoke.

While initially appearing to defend the visitors by taking the unruly Lagos audience to task, Pan provides a scathing satire of the residual colonial attitudes evident

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<sup>93</sup> Imayu.

<sup>94</sup> Anon, 'Playhouse Defeated the Motive', *Nigeria Daily Express*, 16 January 1963.

<sup>95</sup> Anon, 'Macbeth is always New', *Nigerian Outlook*, 6 February 1963.

in the Nottingham Players' endeavours. It begins with a recollection of schooling during the colonial era, one presumably familiar to many in the crowd:

A muddleheaded classmate of mine, by a curious stroke of sheer luck, once had an envied part in an end-of-term production of a Shakespeare play. It was the 'Merchant of Venice'. The fellow tried to make good his chance. His eloquence was brilliant. His oratory, unrivalled. Until he came to this Freudian thunder-clap. [...] "If I PRICK you", he thundered, "do you not laugh? If I TICKLE you, do you not bleed?" Our English teacher, a hulking true-blood Yorkshire man, went about his business the rest of the term with a dazed, tortured look on his face. Even in those colonial days, he won our sympathy.<sup>96</sup>

Pan's anecdote is a reminder of the ways in which Nigerians viewed Shakespeare through a double lens; one of colonial-era schooling, and the other as an irreverent local counter-claim.<sup>97</sup> Shakespeare was treated with deliberate impertinence and discourtesy in Nigerian popular culture and, as a staple of the former colonial power's culture, became a prime target for lampooning and parody.<sup>98</sup> Writers of Onitsha market literature would often call upon Shakespeare in moments of heightened drama and emotional intensity, and then deliberately invert its metaphors and image-laden language. To Nigerians Shakespeare was rich territory for puns, rhymes, and wordplay, as the journalist's classmate's 'Freudian-thunder-clap' ably demonstrates.<sup>99</sup> Due to a mixture of linguistic habits, love of proverbs, and an ambivalent attitude to the notion of Shakespeare as worthy or 'improving', Nigerians had developed a strongly subversive relationship with the playwright. In a longstanding tradition of rebelling against colonial schooling (richly

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<sup>96</sup> Peter Pan, 'One Miserable Night I'll Never Forget', *Daily Times*, 15 January 1963.

<sup>97</sup> Obiechina, pp. 72-88.

<sup>98</sup> For examples of memorable misquotes in romance pamphlets such as Highbred Maxwell's *Public Opinion on Lovers* (1962) see, Obiechina, pp. 72-73.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Iguh's *The Last Days of Lumumba* (1961) and other 'Congo dramas' were rich in Shakespearian allegories as well as political references to *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Obiechina, p. 74.



manifested in popular and widely consumed ‘pulp’ literatures) quoting and misquoting Shakespeare was ‘a persistent and instinctive linguistic reality’ in Nigeria.<sup>100</sup>

Peter Pan articulates the indivisible links between Shakespeare and British colonial rule, sharing it with a knowing readership:

William Shakespeare among the English, is an institution. The Englishman takes Shakespeare as seriously as the worship of his religion. When [...] the poor Yorkshire man [...] requested to be invalided from service and had sworn never again to return to the African continent, we were not at all surprised.<sup>101</sup>

By associating the teaching of Shakespeare with colonialism, and then celebrating the playwright’s departure, Pan is able to lament the sudden return of both in the form of the Nottingham Players. The tour represented a reactionary throwback to the imperial era, as the writer ‘never thought the day would come again when I would watch Shakespeare held to ransom. But there it was again last week [...] The classic contradiction, the weird mix-up’.<sup>102</sup> This unwelcomed cultural intervention meant that:

the Nottingham Playhouse Repertory [...] might easily think that we are a lousy blood-thirsty lot. [...] Shakespeare meant ‘Macbeth’ as a tragedy and wrote it as such. And the Nottingham Players, in spite of overwhelming opposition by the Lagos audience, did their damndest to interpret it that way. But the audience was determined to have a roaring time and no tragedy, Macbeth and all, was going to stop them.<sup>103</sup>

In truth many commentators were sympathetic to the visitors’ dilemma and keen to explain the audience response, pointing out that their weak performance became hostage to a crowd that had:

gone out for enjoyment. That is why it is not surprising that ‘Macbeth’ – a tragedy, tended towards comedy [...] I managed to

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<sup>100</sup> Obiechina, p. 86.

<sup>101</sup> Pan.

<sup>102</sup> Pan.

<sup>103</sup> Pan.

ask the person sitting near me why he was laughing. He told me it was because Lady Macbeth acted more boldly than Macbeth [...] another person told me it was because Macbeth did not behave like a murderer [...] I'm sure none would have told me he laughed because he delights in seeing blood.<sup>104</sup>

Most newspapers picked up on the audience's reaction to Act II. 2., immediately following the murder of Duncan:

Macbeth emerges from the room of crime and shows his blood-stained hands to his wife. He is incensed at the damnable murder. To my alarm a large section of the audience inspired by this gruesome scene, were suddenly gripped by spasms of giggles and laughs! My blood ran cold [...] Each determined effort to retrieve the mood of pathos was resolutely defied by an audience half berserk with absurd levity.<sup>105</sup>

Recalling how Nigerian audiences would laugh or call out at seemingly inappropriate moments during performances, Dench stated that:

Every time I said 'The Thane of Fife had a wife,' it used to bring the house down; everything that rhymed they found hysterically funny, and would call out, 'Say that again, say that again,' and then fall about. Anytime we touched each other they absolutely howled with laughter, and they found the witches equally funny.<sup>106</sup>

Asked why this was, she was told 'because it is very funny to see a white man believing in witches'. Dench, who along with Daneman received the best reviews, considered the tour an important learning experience as an actor, concluding that 'nothing will ever throw you again when you have played to those audiences'.<sup>107</sup>

Kole Omotoso, an academic who has written extensively on African theatre, was assisting the company at that time as a final year A-Level English Literature student at

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<sup>104</sup> Jane West, 'Macbeth in Lagos', *West African Pilot*, 19 January 1963.

<sup>105</sup> Pan.

<sup>106</sup> Dench, p. 36.

<sup>107</sup> Dench, p. 36.

King's College Lagos. He recalled that:

At the point where Macbeth puts out his hand and talks about how 'this my hand will the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red' the Lagos audience would burst into laughter. The actors and actresses wanted us to explain that peculiar reaction. All we could say was that as far as the audience was concerned, the person playing Macbeth was taking the whole thing too seriously. After all it's only a play!<sup>108</sup>

Another reason for the audience laughter during *Macbeth* can be found in the prevalent use of bombast characters in market literature, a characterisation also effectively used in Axworthy's Arts Theatre Shakespeare productions. Given Nigerians' love and frequent use of wordplay, bombast characters were created by pamphlet authors to satirise pretension and verbosity. Medical jargon, technical discourses, political rhetoric, and poetry all became grist to the satirical mill. This underlined the sense that, though Shakespeare was frequently a source of interest and fascination, many would 'unconsciously shy away' from his language and find it indicative of pomposity and arrogance.

The British Council's internal reports attempted to explain away this disastrous opening night by interpreting it through stadial notions of civilisation and progress. It was viewed as:

a sure sign that the convention of Shakespearian tragedy is unfamiliar to many; as indeed it was in Paris when *Macbeth* was first performed there centuries ago. In Lagos, as in Paris, some uncomprehending laughter was heard.<sup>109</sup>

Presumably such local dignitaries were in the same audience as the general public.

Pan's review not only anticipates such official protestations but even caricatures them with some excellent bombast of his own. He concludes with a mock lament that the

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<sup>108</sup> Kole Omotoso, 'Concepts of History and Theatre in Africa', in *A History of Theatre In Africa*, pp. 1-12 (p. 9).

<sup>109</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'Representative's Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963', p. 3.

‘base and crass ignorance displayed with such riotous venom on Friday was disgraceful evidence that we were not — with it!’:

Since when did premeditated murder become an affair for kicks and laughs? Or is it simply that the genius of Shakespeare is beyond the native wit of Nigerians? Zounds! I hope it is the last time we torment the memory of the Legend of Stratford.<sup>110</sup>

The events of the opening night in Lagos were reported nationwide and would often be referred back to in subsequent press reviews. Upon his later arrival in Nsukka, Neville deliberated that ‘audiences in Nigeria had surpassed all expectations’ and that he did not feel ‘sour about such press criticisms’ because ‘one would expect the same anywhere in the world’.<sup>111</sup> In truth the actors were in a thankless position as the Nigeria-based British expatriates who supported and commissioned the tour were also judging them on whether the specially adapted performances met their own muddled Africanist conceptions of what should work. Within this field of contradictory motives and expectations, school performances constituted far safer ground for the visitors, with productions that had not been tailored for West African audiences faring much better. Comfort was taken from the successes of *Twelfth Night* and *Arms and the Man*. Both productions were ‘rapturously received, as [...] the Company performed them with skill and exuberance’.<sup>112</sup> Concerning *Twelfth Night*, ‘the audience were able to react with enthusiasm and delight’, whilst the ‘general feeling amongst all levels of opinion’ was that it was ‘a colourful, vivid and highly entertaining production’.<sup>113</sup> In later interviews West preferred to recall the opening schools matinee of *Twelfth Night* rather than *Macbeth*:

The first place – we opened in Lagos [...] was a biggish hall. And we’d started with *Twelfth Night*. And we didn’t know what it was going – you know, what the reaction was going to be. It was a school audience. And when the two twins came on [at]

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<sup>110</sup> Pan.

<sup>111</sup> Anon, ‘The Nottingham Players Arrive’, *Nigerian Outlook*, 26 January 1963.

<sup>112</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, ‘Representative’s Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963’, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, ‘Representative’s Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963’, p. 3.

the end, the whole audience threw their programmes in the air with delight, and it was absolutely lovely.<sup>114</sup>

Like *Twelfth Night*, *Arms and The Man* was another production not specifically tailored for the touring and in consequence its success came as a surprise. When restaged on its return to Nottingham, a programme note titled 'An African Production' reflected back on its warm reception with West Africa school audiences:

Not one of the most famous but surely one of the most surprisingly successful productions of *Arms and the Man* was the Nottingham Playhouse Company's production which toured West Africa in 1963 [...] It had generally been predicted before the company arrived in Africa that only the two Shakespeare plays in its repertoire would be well known and therefore well received: the Shaw, it was prophesied, would be too sophisticated, the situations too strange, the comment too subtle. But 'Arms' proved to be a great and delightful hit. The blandness of Bluntschli, the bumbling of Petkoff, the apparent innocence of Raina, the snobbish realism of Nicola, the absurdity of Sergius, the sexiness of Louka and the satire at the expense of them all were appreciated readily and relished vociferously. Raina's famous line "My chocolate cream soldier" has always been applauded: in Kano the audience stood up and cheered.<sup>115</sup>

The tour's positive legacy was established by such 'highly praised' productions, even though they contradicted the kind of condescending claims used to counter hostile audience responses to *Macbeth*. Despite the unexpected success of *Arms and the Man*, internal reports still evidence the administrators' desire to infantilise West African audiences. They asserted that such productions were successful only because they were 'played in such a way that a comparatively unsophisticated audience were able to follow the action and dialogue without difficulty', whilst 'at the same time' avoiding any 'suggestion of condescension in the performance'.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Bush, p. 13.

<sup>115</sup> Nottingham University Archives (NUA): MS 679/1/11 '*Arms and the Man* Theatre Programme, (Nottingham Playhouse, April 1964)', p. 7.

<sup>116</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Kano Regional Director's Report', 29 January 1963, in 'Extracts from the Reports on the Tour of The Nottingham Playhouse', 17 April 1963, p. 2. For British

### British Accounts of the Nottingham Playhouse Tour (1963)

Despite the tough reception that the Nottingham players received from public audiences in Lagos, the tour was reported as a resounding success back in Britain. Rather than recording local accounts the British press affirmed the tour's achievement simply in terms of ticket sales, stating for instance that 'right from the start the tour was a fantastic success. It opened in Lagos, Nigeria, on 11 January to a black market in tickets for *'Macbeth'* at £2 10s more than face value'.<sup>117</sup> This was a useful strategy to adopt because it avoided details of the performances' reception and was objectively true. The Eastern Regional Representative Report confirms that productions drew large audiences of around 1,400 per night to open air venues in Nsukka, whilst Port Harcourt Town Hall accommodated an audience of 500 every night, totalling 7,100 tickets sold over one week in the Eastern Region alone.<sup>118</sup> With such a volume of ticket sales, the tour was able to make a profit locally as 'the total receipts amounted to £1,782 (Enugu and Nsukka £1,243, Port Harcourt £539)' whilst the 'estimated local expenditure, including board and lodging' was '£1.203 (Enugu and Nsukka £800, Port Harcourt £403)'.<sup>119</sup>

Focusing on high attendance was also an effective press strategy because the emphasis on volume obfuscated the assumption that this equalled creative success as well. In the important context of the British Council's long struggle with hostile right-wing elements in the British press, it helped justify the outlay of government funds on

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debates on ELT that worked through the transition from residual modes of colonial schooling to the more technocratic approach promoted by America, see *The Teaching of English Literature Overseas: Extracts from the proceedings of a Conference held at Kings College, Cambridge 16-18 July 1962 under the auspices of the British Council*, ed. by John Press, (London: Methuen, 1963); Joshua A. Fishman, Charles A. Ferguson, and Jyotrindra Das Gupta, eds., *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1968); Julian Dakin, Brian Tiffen, and H. G. Widdowson, eds., *Language in Education: The Problem in Commonwealth Africa and the Indo-Pakistan Sub-Continent*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Eric Ashby, *Universities: British, Indian, African: A Study in the Ecology of Higher Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).

<sup>117</sup> Anon, 'Shakespeare and Shaw in the Sun: Nottingham Conquers Africa', *Stage and Television Today*, 4 April 1963.

<sup>118</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'Representative's Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963', p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'Representative's Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963', p. 4.

contentiously liberal projects such as touring Shakespeare around West Africa. Thirdly, it provided editors and journalists with a series of sub-narrative options that could signpost, often in comic anecdotal ways, West Africa's continuing subservience to Britain. The most common trope was to stress how the demand to see the visiting theatre company led to a comically enterprising black market. Actors' anecdotes from early post-tour interviews provided the rough material for journalists to construct images of Africans desperately clamouring to see British Shakespeare. Typical articles portrayed crowds so large that the audience wanted to sit on the stage, entranced mothers breast-feeding whilst watching *Macbeth*, or places in which the black market demands for a ticket 'stood at three goats!'<sup>120</sup>

This image of agitated crowds bustling for tickets led in turn to the surprisingly common use of the phrase 'near riot' with the production's visit to Kano for instance, apparently requiring the deployment of 'extra police to repel [...] ticket hungry crowds'.<sup>121</sup> Even recent anecdotal accounts such as Dench's autobiography make use of the phrase, stating for instance that 'the moment I met Sebastian at the end, when we did look very much alike, there was incredible excitement, it was almost a riot'.<sup>122</sup> The pervasiveness of this term is indicative of the contradictions inherent in British attitudes as it contains both the wished for validation of the visitors' importance (a dramatic measure of the impact they desired to have upon Nigerian audiences), as well as confirmation of what was fearfully expected from African audiences prior to the tour. Similar utterances can be found in accompanying reports on American Jazz tours, suggesting that the term provided common and euphemistic shorthand for the potential dangers inherent in exposing 'hungry' African audiences to the 'riches' of Anglo-American culture.

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<sup>120</sup> Richard Hampton, 'They're Back', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 16 March 1963.

<sup>121</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'Representative's Annual Report - 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963', p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Dench, p. 35.

A reverential press piece entitled ‘Shakespeare and Shaw in the Sun: Nottingham Conquers Africa’ appeared in *The Stage and Television Today* upon the company’s return to the UK and was selected for circulation within British Council reports. It serves as a succinct illustration of how the tour’s history and reception was constructed in the most positive light possible for metropolitan readers.<sup>123</sup> A typical tendency was to confuse positive anecdotes from successful school performances with the less fruitful public ones:

All along the line audiences were far more demonstrative than at home. At times they were so enthusiastic that they recited the chief speeches with the actors [...] it was often a case of reliving the atmosphere of the original Shakespeare performance of the Globe. Heroines were clapped, the villains roundly hissed and booed [...] With such a stream of uninhibited playgoers – ready to travel hundreds of miles in some cases – and with such an enthusiastic atmosphere surrounding the entire performance, the tour reached exhilarating heights.<sup>124</sup>

This deliberate blending of school and public performances led to incongruous and over-determined accounts, suggesting that Nigerian audiences were simultaneously reciting key speeches along with the actors, throwing their programmes in the air with joy, rioting for tickets, and mercilessly heckling the performers off the stage. The lengths taken to secure such a positive post-tour account suggest it was essential for securing the British Council’s continuing mission in the longer term.

Spin and exaggeration ushered in the return of New Elizabethan style rhetorical flourishes with Alfred Harbage’s wartime notion of Elizabethan theatre serving as an emblem for class-social cohesion.<sup>125</sup> The underlying assumption was that the rough-and-

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<sup>123</sup> Anon, ‘Shakespeare and Shaw in the Sun: Nottingham Conquers Africa’.

<sup>124</sup> Anon, ‘Shakespeare and Shaw in the Sun: Nottingham Conquers Africa’.

<sup>125</sup> Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare’s Audience* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969). John Drakakis describes Harbage’s ‘harmonious integration’ as ‘a picture of the Elizabethan theatre as an institution in which different social groups relinquished their mutual antagonisms in favour of a corporate activity that was both festive and anticipated the modern spirit of democracy’. John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1985), p. 13.



ready composition of early-modern English audiences was proto-democratic, and that such dynamics could still be found in 1960s West Africa. The validation is two-fold.

Whilst re-inscribing African's subordinate position within a historically framed taxonomy of progress towards 'civilisation', it also elevates Shakespeare to a transcendent level of universality, an exemplary status that the British tourists were taking credit for gifting to profoundly grateful West African audiences.

The laconic tone that Terence Knapp employs to record his first reaction after being invited to join the tour is revealing of professional attitudes towards cultural diplomacy at the time. It shows a half-serious and knowing cynicism:

Neville had been invited to form a Company by the British Council whose function it is to spread the good British news throughout the world when it can afford to do so. Of course I wanted to toddle off to the depths of darkest Africa to play Shakespeare with [...] Neville, Judi Dench, old Uncle Tom Cobbley and all. It was the first such expedition to that part of the former Empire although there had been many such tours to South East Asia, the Americas, and often to India where the cognoscenti seemed most fond of the Bard in the Queen's English.<sup>126</sup>

Throughout the West African section of his autobiography, Knapp repeatedly invokes a whole host of exotic tropes that appear simultaneously in other actors' accounts. He calls upon a long nineteenth-century colonial heritage with repeated focus on black magic, frightening animal encounters, exotic turbaned natives, and more than a few near riots. Knapp's rhetorical style also demonstrated an awareness of the bizarre and anachronistic nature of the cultural imperialism he was embarked upon, even as he so keenly re-inscribed it. He enjoyed recounting the experience askance, as if through a lens of clichés, whilst also saving face through much amused and ironic detachment. Overall the actor's use of self-deprecating humour is reminiscent of Holland and Huggan's insight on the typical narrative persona adopted in post-war British travel writing. That 'the

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<sup>126</sup> Terence Knapp, *Hawaii's Adopted World-Class Actor* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Press, 2000), pp. 56-57.

gentleman abroad in a post-imperial context, might well appear ridiculous; but ridicule, precisely, becomes his licence to perform'.<sup>127</sup> It is noticeable how this insight also reflects upon the bombastic quality the British actors brought to their opening night in Lagos, confirming that the audience's derision went beyond targeting bad Shakespeare to undermining the post-imperial act of modest self-depreciation that constituted the visitors' 'licence to perform' in the first place.

Patrick Brantlinger has labelled the kinds of darkest Africa tropes that Knapp so enjoyed using (ones usually associated with H. Rider Haggard novels and mid-to-late nineteenth-century adventure fiction) as imperial gothic.<sup>128</sup> The Nottingham Players seemed to have shared a collective, and selective, memory that recycled the same stories built around such genre clichés. A popular anecdote of vultures lurking on the peripheries of the stage, illustrates the way certain images took hold and migrated across the various actors' biographies and even into a range of other tour ephemera such as journalism, programme notes, and obituaries.<sup>129</sup> Frank Dunlop recorded how, during rehearsal for one *Macbeth* show, he noticed a row of vultures sitting on the screen at the back of the stage and thought 'that couldn't be more wonderful'.<sup>130</sup> Dench breathed more life into the anecdote, recalling how 'vultures would sit hunched at the top watching us, so during *Macbeth* I used to say, 'For goodness' sake twitch when you're killed, they're waiting to pick your bones'.<sup>131</sup>

Many of the stresses of touring also manifested themselves as various types of gallows humour. In a later introduction to Gareth Armstrong's *A Case for Shylock: Around the World with Shakespeare's Jew* (2004) (another Valerie West tour that, with their typically reduced cast of two by the 1970s and 1980s, were dubbed 'Val's Duos'), Dench delivered

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<sup>127</sup> Holland and Huggan, p. 31.

<sup>128</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and the Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 227–54.

<sup>129</sup> For a history of *Macbeth* theatre anecdotes see, Menzer, pp. 173–211.

<sup>130</sup> Anon, 'Tour when line of Vultures sat on the back of the stage', *Evening Post*, 6 December 2008.

<sup>131</sup> Dench, p. 36.

an anecdote concerning a journey by road in Northern Nigeria. With a doubling effect the account both bemoans and celebrates the manufactured hardship of touring, reconfiguring it as a life threatening expedition:

Recalling Valerie West [...] reminded me of a journey from Kano to Kadina when James Cairncross suggested the first line of a limerick: 'One Christmas Miss Valerie West ...'. After hours on a dusty road I came up with:

'One Christmas Miss Valerie West,  
Laid the Nottingham Playhouse to rest.  
Over the thirty sad graves,  
Of these thespian braves,  
Cried 'I was only doing my best'.<sup>132</sup>

Although the imperial gothic motifs are tongue-in-cheek they still evoke a kind of Conradian atavism where the dangerous route of travelling deeper into colonial space takes the traveller backwards in time, towards potential death and destruction. Likewise, it presents the tour as an anti-conquest, with the company fashioned as explorers risking life and limb in the selfless pursuit of bringing Western knowledge to new and grateful territories. Though playfully rendered, it fits the tour's ideological formation and retains traces of previous imperial iterations that insisted upon Europeans' moral and intellectual superiority over the indigenous cultures they were setting out to encounter.<sup>133</sup>

Such half-joking, half-serious fixations on themes of impending death, witchcraft, and other imperial gothic figures, crossed the threshold of travel and entered into the context of the Shakespeare performance itself. It formed a kind of thematic inversion of the ways in which Shakespeare was meant to be topical or capable of speaking to West African audiences. Knapp's account of the first performance in Kano reads:

we performed in Northern Nigeria in a vast sports stadium that had been built for the Pan-African games. We performed mid-centre stadium, surrounded by several thousand turbaned natives from the area. The desert night was cool [...] and the acoustics were fabulous. I was playing

<sup>132</sup> Gareth Armstrong, *A Case for Shylock: Around The World with Shakespeare's Jew* (London: Nick Horn Books, 2004), pp. ix-x.

<sup>133</sup> Thompson, p. 145.

Feste in *Twelfth Night* [...] I played Feste as a white-faced clown with tear-drop eyes. When I made my first appearance there was an odd response from the audience. In the rowdy scene that disturbs Malvolio's sleep [...] there was hardly any laughter in spite of much comic by-play. We came offstage disturbed and troubled. The Nigerian house manager was waiting for us in the wings. He spoke solemnly to John Neville, who played Malvolio, all the while giving me side-glances. John turned to me and said, 'You'll have to take off that make-up. A white face here signifies a zombie, a ghost, which is what they think you are.' The house manager had told John the audience were literally scared by my appearance. Hurriedly I wiped off the make-up and reappeared clean faced. The audience relaxed. Feste got his laughs and all was well from then on.<sup>134</sup>

Here belated evocations of a bygone imperial era are filtered through the more farcical post-war modes of self-depreciation and parody. The anxiety underscoring Knapp's enabling comic strategies are momentarily exposed. On a surface level, his white-faced clown merely signifies yet another humorous breakdown in cultural understanding between bumbling, though well-intentioned, British visitors and their tolerant Nigerian hosts. The instant when he is considered 'a zombie, a ghost' by 'several thousand turbaned natives' introduces a more threatening edge that unsettles the certainty of his assumptions. Strangely echoing *Macbeth*'s unintended reception as comedy in Lagos, Kano's audience interpreted *Twelfth Night*'s jester (a figure highly suggestive of the British strolling players more generally) as something uncanny and disruptive. For a brief moment it served as a reminder that, although humour and self-depreciation provided the visitors with a passport to perform their eccentric circuit throughout Nigeria, only the privileged representatives of the ex-colonial power could get away with undertaking it with such impunity.<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>134</sup> Knapp, p. 135.

<sup>135</sup> Holland and Huggan, p. 31.

According to the British Council's archival records, the Nottingham Players' cultural outreach was an unprecedented success that enjoyed having thousands of 'column inches [...] dedicated to it' across West Africa as well as 'extensive coverage on the radio and television services'.<sup>136</sup> It was even considered to be 'very much more successful than any previous foreign tour' with Lord Head sending 'a most enthusiastic telegram of congratulations to the Company'.<sup>137</sup> Many in-house commentators viewed the achievement in Cold War terms, and with the kind of competitive national prestige that framed the initial Foreign and Commonwealth Office request:

The image of Shakespeare received a brilliant shine. The tour was most valuable to the Council's work in this region; it did much for our prestige, and more importantly, Anglo-Nigerian relations. It was simply bigger, better, better organised and of more value to Nigerians than the Russian show of 61 and the American show of 62'.<sup>138</sup>

Major General W. H. A. Bishop, the High Commissioner of the Commonwealth Relations Office in London, stated that:

We continue to be extremely satisfied with the co-operation between the British Council and this High Commission. The regular series of meetings which we hold draw together the threads of innumerable day-to-day consultations which take place between their staff and ours; and the British Council are working admirably as our eyes and ears in the educational and connected fields.<sup>139</sup>

The notion that the tour was merely a diplomatic manoeuvre within the larger geopolitical game of the Cultural Cold War is nicely undercut by the telling acknowledgement that the British Council should be commended for 'working admirably' as the government's 'eyes and ears in the educational and connected fields' in

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<sup>136</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Kano Regional Director's Report', 29 January 1963, in 'Extracts from the Reports on the Tour of The Nottingham Playhouse. Compiled from reports received to 17 April 1963', p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'High Commissioner's Comments on Representative's Annual Report', 8 August 1963, p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Kano Regional Director's Report', 29 January 1963, in 'Extracts from the Reports on the Tour of The Nottingham Playhouse. Compiled from reports received to 17 April 1963', p. 3.

<sup>139</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'Eastern Nigeria Regional Representative's Annual Report for 1962/63', p. 1.

West Africa. This well-informed view of the truly interventionist and neo-colonial agency of cultural diplomacy is more fully acknowledged elsewhere, and in quite unguarded and gloating terms:

with over 7000 Nigerians, from the Governor-General downwards, literally clamouring to see Shakespeare [...] [the tour] brought home, as no other project could have, just how starved a developing country can become, and just how grateful it can be for what it receives [...] The Provisional Commissioner of Port Harcourt summed it up in the presence of the Representative, Nigeria, when he said: 'Shakespeare, Libraries and the English Language – those are the outstanding British Council contributions to eastern Nigeria'.<sup>140</sup>

Evidently the tour demonstrated the usefulness of Shakespearean cultural diplomacy in leveraging influence over a 'starved [...] developing country grateful [...] for what it receives'. Given the scale of self-congratulation and achievement shared between official minds, the Nottingham Playhouse tour managed to instigate a legacy of its own.

Initially this took the form of the British Council providing a £1000 fund for Geoffrey Axworthy to undertake a nationwide tour of Nigeria as part of the globally coordinated events commemorating Shakespeare's quartercentenary in 1964.<sup>141</sup>

Continuing to adopt local performance idioms to western technical know-how, Axworthy and the University Players updated one of Ogunmola's 'gaily painted' Yoruba mammy wagons 'with a generator, control board, lights, props, and equipment' that became the University Players' 'Theatre on Wheels' for their 'Grand Shakespeare Festival' tour across Nigeria.<sup>142</sup> A follow up report on this tour for the DAC is worth quoting at length, as it evidences how the British Council now considered itself

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<sup>140</sup> TNA: BW 128/9, 'Eastern Nigeria Regional Representative's Annual Report for 1962/63', pp. 1-2.

<sup>141</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Report on The University of Ibadan Travelling Theatre tour of Nigeria, March 1964', p. 1. For an example of the Soviet Shakespeare quartercentenary see, Irena R. Makaryk, "Here is my Space": The 1964 Shakespeare Celebrations in the USSR', in *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe*, pp. 51-62.

<sup>142</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Report on The University of Ibadan Travelling Theatre tour of Nigeria, March 1964', p. 2.

responsible for, and closely invested in, this latest manifestation of Axworthy's longstanding work at the Arts Theatre:

a replica of an Elizabethan stage [...] built onto a large trailer in such a way that it could very quickly be erected or collapsed for transportation as required. An entertainment entitled 'A Shakespeare Festival' consisting of extracts from seven plays, linked by a tape-recorded narration, was compiled by Geoffrey Axworthy and the 'Travelling Theatre' went on the road in March 1964 [...] There is no doubt that artistically the tour was a major success [...] Audience response, which at times reached the point of participation, was, as we have come to expect, most rewarding: every argument and every piece of comic business being greeted with spontaneous applause. The performances were enchanting. The calibre of the acting was high, in some extracts very high indeed. The youth and freshness of the cast gave well-worn scenes a new vigour and bloom. [...] the stage appearing by magic out of a 'lorry' and standing floodlit in the centre of a dark, open space [...] Axworthy estimated that the show had an aggregate audience of 60,000. This figure speaks for itself, and for the future.<sup>143</sup>

Despite its complete reliance on local skills, practices, and knowledge, the report's language not only reproduces so many of the Africanist tropes we have identified in actors' travelogues, but seems to elevate them to a new and heightened mode. It portrays Axworthy as a pioneering Shakespearean evangelist, coping with 'overwhelmingly enthusiastic and sometimes riotous audiences in places beyond the reach of a normal touring company'.<sup>144</sup>

The Nottingham Players' tour clearly fired the imagination and ambitions of Britain's cultural diplomatic administration and by the end of 1964 the DAC were already proposing future tours. The Commonwealth Relations Office and the British Council attached 'great importance to following up on the Nottingham Playhouse Tour to West Africa' with a further visit in 1965-1966 intending to deploy the same company.<sup>145</sup>

Confirming the British Council's habit of not only subsidising and commissioning

<sup>143</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Report on The University of Ibadan Travelling Theatre tour of Nigeria, March 1964', p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Report on The University of Ibadan Travelling Theatre tour of Nigeria, March 1964', p. 2.

<sup>145</sup> TNA: BW 120/3, DAC Minutes 1961-1965, 'Report on Tours', 17 April 1964.

theatre companies, but also adapting and appropriating such works for their own uses over time, Knapp recalled that by 1966 there would be no need for Axworthy. An 'offer from Shell Oil' had been secured 'to provide a travelling theatre, a custom made pantechnicon' that would afford the possibility of 'long distance freedom' for the British Council's very own company of 'latter-day strolling players':<sup>146</sup>

Designed as a gigantic truck, it would have its own dynamo for electricity [...] A long side would be let down to make a thrust stage. It would allow us to be self-sufficient, eliminating the transportation and performance problems we had encountered before [...] All we would need were hampers of costumes, properties and some basic furniture. Completely self-contained, the vehicle would enable us to travel to far out parts of West Africa where audiences, whether two dozen or two hundred or two thousand would make themselves at ease on the ground around us to view the productions.<sup>147</sup>

Through such an act of cultural appropriation, this Yoruba Travelling Theatre-style tour was to be undertaken by British tourists who intended to play at 'a wide variety of schools, colleges and community centres [...] give recitals, theatre workshops' and even aimed at holding 'seminars and discussions so that students got a thorough opportunity to learn about theatre arts'. To commemorate the tour, the royal celebrity photographer the Earl of Snowden was meant to be on-board, and was commissioned to undertake a picture story covering this 'Pantechnicon Tour' as it brought Shakespeare to the far North Western Nigerian city of Sokoto and the small neighbouring nation of Benin.<sup>148</sup> However on 15 January 1966, ten days before the company was due to set off, the coup d'état that would eventually lead to the Biafran Civil War left the principal date in the North in rebel hands, and Ibadan sealed off with street fighting.<sup>149</sup> Knapp recalled how, pressured by the right-wing press, the British Council also 'cancelled the proposed visit to Ghana whose President broke off diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom over

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<sup>146</sup> Knapp, p. 136.

<sup>147</sup> Knapp, pp. 136-37.

<sup>148</sup> Knapp, p. 137.

<sup>149</sup> Bourne, pp. 111-29.



the situation in Rhodesia [...] shock and dismay clouded all of us when we were solemnly assembled and told it was all off'.<sup>150</sup> Notwithstanding this setback, the British Council shipped the Nottingham players off to South East Asia where they were able to undertake a two-month tour of Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and the Philippines instead.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Knapp, pp. 137-38

<sup>151</sup> Knapp, p. 139.

## CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study I proposed several guiding questions: why was Shakespeare chosen to project British theatrical culture overseas? What domestic impact did such practices have? Did touring support specific geo-political goals concerning the Cold War and decolonisation, and if so, what strategic political and commercial advantages were pursued? Finally, how were these cultural expeditions received by their target audiences, and experienced by those tasked to undertake them? I am now in a position to provide answers to these difficult questions, and in doing so will focus on the tensions and contradictions that arose as a consequence of the tours' travels between metropolitan and peripheral spaces.

In this thesis I have provided illustrative examples of early attempts at using staged Shakespeare to project a positive image of Britain overseas in the late 1930s, and have described how such practices were shaped by anti-Communist and pro-imperial attitudes both before and after the Second World War (Chapter 1). I then discussed how Shakespeare tours expanded into supporting specific Cold War and colonial aims in Australia between 1948 and 1953, whilst also enabling state, institutional, and individual interests to be advanced under the ideological banner of Greater Britishness (Chapter 2). I further outlined how, despite financial limitations, British Council supported cultural-diplomatic tours engaged in direct anti-Communist measures, whilst Britain's domestic Shakespeare industry acquired a veneer of political urgency through its association with the Cold War struggle (Chapter 3). Finally, my study determined how Shakespeare tours supported the interests of British educational publishing in Nigeria as part of Britain's broader neo-colonial practices across post-independence West Africa (Chapter 4).

Much of the complexity of decolonisation was mediated through the simplified antagonisms of Cold War rivalry. The overarching narrative of incompatible ideologies forced postcolonial states into making stark binary choices in their paths towards modernisation, and helped rationalise Britain's self-interest as the best choice for decolonising nations as well.<sup>1</sup> Britain could look forward to maintaining considerable global influence if it handled the loss of Empire diplomatically, and hence sought to employ Shakespearean culture as an effective compensatory device. Examples of this abound, from Egypt to Australia, Poland, and Nigeria. The earliest post-war establishment of theatrical festivals came too late to salvage Britain's weakened cultural prestige in Egypt, where it found itself squeezed between massive American economic investment and the Soviet Union's attempts at securing a new regional influence.<sup>2</sup> In Australia, Britain pursued its interests more effectively within the post-war climate of America's advancing global hegemony.<sup>3</sup> London bolstered trade and security links through the strengthening of a Greater-British identity, while the intelligence network it secured throughout the Dominions demonstrated the Commonwealth's use and relevance to America's global Cold War.<sup>4</sup> The fear that delayed independence could open up a space for Communist advances framed Anglo-America's strategy in West Africa, and active counter-insurgency measures in Malaysia justified Britain's continuing imperial rule in US eyes.<sup>5</sup> Although American and Soviet antagonism towards European Empires

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<sup>1</sup> Westad, pp. 396-407.

<sup>2</sup> In 1945 the Soviet leadership sought to use the post-war settlement to 'establish a firm foothold in the Mediterranean basin' starting with Italy's former colony, Libya. In Westad, p. 59. Vladimir O. Pechatnov, 'The Soviet Union and the World, 1944-1953' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume 1*, ed. by Malvern P. Leffler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 90-111, (p. 96).

<sup>3</sup> For a history of America's post-war hegemony that also takes into account the role of white-settler Dominions, see Andrew Baker, *Constructing a Post-War Order: The Rise of U.S. Hegemony and the origins of the Cold War* (New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> On Britain's rush to establish the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in response to Soviet infiltration in 1940s Canberra, see Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 111-15. Nigel West, 'ASIO Opens its Books', in *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence*, 28.3 (2014), 620-29.

<sup>5</sup> On Soviet Policies towards West Africa see, Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). In March 1949 a US National Security Council paper stated that '19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism is no longer a practicable system in SEA [South East Asia] excepting in the short run in Malaya'. In Westad, p. 113.

made decolonisation inevitable, global anti-Communism helped shape the process and outcomes in ways beneficial to Britain, with Shakespeare tours playing a major role on the cultural diplomatic front.

Although the UK government did not consider cultural diplomacy to be a form of direct action, I have established how Shakespeare tours occurred at key moments in the history of UK foreign policy between 1939 and 1964.<sup>6</sup> The practice was rife with contradictions and inconsistencies however, and the projection of Shakespearean cultural diplomacy overseas was determined by the complex variety of internal and external contingencies that each era and undertaking presented. Although there was massive post-war demand for British theatre abroad, tours were only intermittently deployed. Gaps frequently appeared between Embassies' or Representatives' urgent requests, and the occasional cultural initiatives the inadequately funded British Council was able to put together. The arms-length relationship between the UK government and the British Council suggests that culture's use to foreign diplomacy was viewed with scepticism, in stark contrast to cultural diplomacy's central and valued position within Soviet Russian and American strategic thinking.<sup>7</sup> Although this study had uncovered few examples where the British Council's activities went counter to the spirit of UK foreign policy, it would be an excessive generalisation to assert that the British Council was a constant or easily wielded weapon in the direct application of state power. That said, the organisation was clearly attuned to the needs of the Foreign, Colonial, and Commonwealth departments that provided the majority of its funding. When needed, the British Council was able to orchestrate a wide range of state-private resources in order to compete against more state-centralised opponents on the cultural front.

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<sup>6</sup> J. M. Lee, 'British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War: 1946-61', pp. 126.

<sup>7</sup> For examples from the US Information Agency see, Cull. For the propaganda activities of the Communist International see, Jeremy Agnew and Kevin McDermott *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

One of the main reasons why Britain was unwilling to settle on a formal cultural position was its conflicted position at the heart of a vast global empire.<sup>8</sup> Any centralised policy projected overseas could expose Britain to unforeseen domestic consequences, complicating the UK's own rapid social transformation during the post-war period. Shakespeare tours made sense within the context of decolonisation, where they could help perpetuate colonial-era practices in education, promise the continuation of a British 'presence', and foster the 'right people' to lead post-independence countries in directions favourable to Britain itself. Domestically however, as Britain underwent a period of imperial retrenchment, Commonwealth expectation of visiting, studying, and working in the 'mother country' contradicted hardening metropolitan attitudes that quickly sought to curb non-white immigration.<sup>9</sup> In a similar disjuncture, although the burgeoning Anglo-American field of English Language Teaching offered enormous commercial and diplomatic advantages, America's developmental approach undermined any residual association of the English language with English literature, and symbolic figures such as Shakespeare. English literature's role within the broader civilising mission of Empire (including the supposed provision of an English sensibility and identity) dissolved within the more democratic post-war concessions it was forced to make.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, even royalist Dominion migrants such as Loudon Sainthill inadvertently brought 'disruptive' American popular culture with them to the heart of the UK's Shakespeare establishment. This was

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<sup>8</sup> J. M. Lee, 'British Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War: 1946-61', pp. 122-26.

<sup>9</sup> During the decade following the symbolic arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush* at Tilbury docks on 21 June 1948, the estimated figure for colonial migration is 180,000 people, half that for European migration over the same period. Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 132. For analysis of the era as experienced by the British Caribbean writers George Lamming and Sam Selvon, see MacPhee, *Postwar British Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, pp. 40-51.

<sup>10</sup> In *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Gauri Viswanathan details how 'the humanistic functions' of literary study were 'vital in the process of sociopolitical control' in colonial India, with 'the English literary text' functioning as 'a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state'. Viswanathan, p. 2, p. 23.

part of a much broader domestic trend that led commentators on both the left and right to bemoan the Americanisation of post-war metropolitan British culture itself.<sup>11</sup>

In attempting to recover its prestige during the post-war era Britain faced the dichotomy of celebrating liberal democracy at home whilst also prolonging colonial modes of exploitation abroad. It aimed to achieve this balancing-act by continuing the near-infinite variety of state-private interests and political settlements that had characterised the entrepreneurial core of the British Empire throughout its long history.<sup>12</sup> Shakespeare proved to be conducive to such ad-hoc and improvised approaches as it could be adopted to suit a wide range of political and commercial situations. In the Eastern Bloc, Shakespeare affirmed a shared European cultural heritage beyond the immediate horizon of Soviet rule, whilst in Australia hearing Shakespeare performed as a 'living language' was presented as the embodiment of a Greater-British ideal. Despite such successes, the polyvalence of the playwright's work and legacy meant that touring companies also had to work hard to assert any exclusively British claim on a writer who had already been assimilated into the cultural landscapes of the countries being targeted. As we saw in Portugal, Italy, Egypt, and Australia, the British Council's institutional habit was to ignore or dismiss local and competing Shakespeares. Only when foreign claims could be of use to the British state were they acknowledged. Polish Shakespeare's anti-Stalinist gestures were imported back to Britain and hailed as an example, whilst Nigerian claims were disavowed until they became useful to validate the global dimensions of Britain's celebrations for the quartercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in 1964.

Given the instrumental ways in which Shakespeare tours were deployed, performers' recollections tended to adopt the mix of worn imperial tropes and self-

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<sup>11</sup> For the classic account of British intellectual concern over the rapid Americanisation of post-war British Culture see, Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy*. For an alternative and contemporary polemic see, Adrian Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and Youth Culture, 1945-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', in *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, ed. by John Gallagher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) pp. 1-18.

deprecating humour that characterised post-war British travel writing. In the face of local criticism the actors ultimately sought refuge in the theatre itself, with Shakespeare becoming an interpretative frame for apprehending the complex cultures and societies they traversed. Shakespeare was not only the passport that validated such touring practices, it ultimately provided the optic through which such challenging encounters were shrunk and rendered legible. As a result, and despite some well-meaning intentions, commonplace assumption about Shakespeare's universal relevance meant that many actors perpetuated the circular and self-serving logic of the national-cultural programmes they were engaged to perform.

Further research into tours that took place between 1939-1963 and beyond would open up fresh avenues of investigation into touring Shakespeare's role in British cultural diplomacy. India especially is an overlooked setting demanding close consideration of the contested role Shakespeare played within a context of anti-colonial struggle and Cold War politics.<sup>13</sup> T.W. Morray's 1944 report urging the British Council to establish itself on the subcontinent argued that, although the British imperial presence had 'anglicised the Indian public mind', India was 'looking to other countries, notably America'.<sup>14</sup> Morray's paper anticipated the influence that both imperial cultural legacies and Cold War politics would have in post-war India, with Shakespeare tours playing an important role in 'systematic' attempts to 'maintain the intellectual communion of the past'.<sup>15</sup> As public talks on the earliest India tours led by The Norman Marshall Company were garlanded with New Elizabethan tropes aimed at defending an embattled sense of post-imperial Englishness, anxiety over Britain's diminishing role in the world even saw nineteenth-century notions of Shakespeare healing class conflict in England extrapolated

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years*, p. 157.

<sup>15</sup> In Donaldson, p. 157.

to the idea of Shakespeare healing postcolonial conflict between India and the UK.<sup>16</sup> The research undertaken in this study could be extended into considering the extent to which Britain's cultural bodies viewed post-war touring practices as part of a continuing mission to transmit 'universal' and 'trans-historical' cultural-imperial values to India via Shakespeare.<sup>17</sup>

Despite elite schools and universities providing the bulk of touring venues on the subcontinent—where any actor hesitating to deliver their lines mid-performance would quickly find themselves 'prompted by several members of the audience'—many British actors found dealing with the actual legacy of Britain's colonial education disturbing.<sup>18</sup> Letters sent by John Gielgud whilst touring India border on the gothic, as the actor recorded meeting 'decadent and snobbish Indian princes — educated at Sandhurst and Oxford — who were pockmarked and degenerate', an 'Indian poet with glasses and a face like a chimpanzee who recited lyrics at me in bell-like tones', and 'two young students of Shakespeare who goggled at me' and asked why they couldn't 'come to England and act Shakespeare in my company!'<sup>19</sup> As Indian claims to British identity via Shakespeare seemed to disturb actors so profoundly, further research comparing concurrent tours (to Australia and India in the early 1950s for instance), could expose telling similarities and differences in local attempts to transcend class or racial categories through their respective educational and cultural associations with Shakespeare.

Further comparative examples within Southeast Asia could consider how Britain's touring visitors encountered and mediated such tensions across a variety of

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<sup>16</sup> The British Council established an office and lecture programme at Stratford-upon-Avon during the SMT's Festival of Britain season, which in turn led to the publication of *Shakespeare Survey*. Selected talks including Marshall's 'Shakespeare Abroad' reiterated Algernon Swinburne's claims that Shakespeare understands 'the mysteries and qualities of human character' and fathoms 'the unfathomable depths of spiritual nature, to solve its else insoluble riddles, to reconcile its else irreconcilable discrepancies'. Norman Marshall, 'Shakespeare Abroad', in *Talking of Shakespeare*, ed. by John Garrett (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), pp. 91-110 (pp. 109-10).

<sup>17</sup> Nandi Bhatia, *Acts of Authority, Acts of Resistance: Theatre and Politics in Post Colonial India* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Mangan, ed., *Gielgud's Letters* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2004), p. 83.



locales. Between September 1964 and February 1965 The New Shakespeare Company (the touring name of the Open Air Theatre, Regents Park) took productions of *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, and *Richard II* on an extensive tour to Pakistan, India, Ceylon, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Borneo, Malaya, and Singapore. As part of the global celebrations that commemorated Shakespeare's 1964 quartercentenary, this ambitious tour involved the transportation of pre-built sets, lighting equipment, 120 costumes, and 33 players on a 23 week journey that surpassed the Nottingham Players' West Africa tour in terms of scale and determination.<sup>20</sup> Research into a single tour that managed to intersect such differing territories would help address the contested nature of 'British-ness', and compare what the various claims of Shakespeare ownership that existed meant in each setting, especially in terms of class, race, and national identities. Such findings could also be brought into revealing tension with assumptions of British-ness that the New Shakespeare Company exemplified and promoted whilst on tour.

Are we to consign the history of the British Council in the era of the Cold War and decolonisation to the past? Or do the assumptions and practices identified in this study still persist? Today the progressive rhetoric of globalisation justifies the continued deployment of Shakespeare in British cultural diplomacy.<sup>21</sup> The playwright's international popularity is framed as a fortuitous cultural side effect of globalisation, and the kind of material and institutional performance histories I have established here are barely acknowledged. As part of its activities commemorating Shakespeare's quartercentenary celebrations in 2016, the British Council explicitly encouraged the use of Shakespeare as 'soft power' in a pamphlet showcasing links between itself and the UK's Shakespeare industry. *All The World's: How Shakespeare is viewed around the globe and the role his work can*

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<sup>20</sup> David Conville, *The Park: The Story of the Open Air Theatre, Regents Park* (London: Oberon Books, 2007), pp. 34-6.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander C. Y. Huang, 'Global Shakespeares as Methodology', *Shakespeare*, 9.3 (2013), 273-90 (p. 285). In 2008-09 British Council expenditure stood around £622 million. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *The Work of the British Council 2008-09: Second Report of Session 2009-10* (London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2010), p. 19.

*play to support the UK's soft power* (2016) outlines the various ways in which Shakespeare can be called upon to support Britain's international diplomatic efforts in future.<sup>22</sup> Under the title 'Shakespeare's Continued Relevance Today' a checklist is provided of the 'timelessness of Shakespeare themes' that are able to 'resonate powerfully with contemporary audiences and address issues all too familiar in today's world'. Individual plays are called upon to shed light on pressing international 'issues' with *Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winters Tale* and *Pericles* providing insight into the contemporary plight of 'refugees and shipwrecks', a topical reference perhaps to the 1,015,078 people who fled across the Mediterranean to Europe in 2016.<sup>23</sup>

As crude and reductive as this approach is it reiterates many of the same assumptions found in the cultural history I trace throughout this study. Whilst claiming topicality and the appearance of addressing real-world concerns Shakespeare's name continues to validate self-serving forms of English cultural chauvinism, whilst its supposed universality provides vague gestures to the complex contingencies of actual international crises. Although it is beyond the scope of my study to examine what political and economic concerns underlie present-day cultural projections, such reductive and instrumental approaches suggest that practices similar to those undertaken during the post-war period of decolonisation and the Cold War continue in updated forms and reiterations.

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<sup>22</sup> Alasdair Donaldson, *All The World's: How Shakespeare is viewed around the globe and the role his work can play to support the UK's soft power* (London: British Council Press, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> According to the pamphlet *Macbeth* and *Richard III* address 'Political legitimacy, tyranny and resistance', while *The Taming of the Shrew* explores issues of 'Servitude and Slavery'. Donaldson, *All the World's*, p. 22. UNHCR Staff, 'Mediterranean Death toll Soars, 2016 is deadliest year yet'. <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2016/10/580f3e684/mediterranean-death-toll-soars-2016-deadliest-year.html>, [accessed 6 August 2017].

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